From Mrs Herbert Glenkell
to Mrs Pyeroft
Sept 12 1883

SQUIRE LISLE'S BEQUEST.

VOL. II.

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SQUIRE LISLE'S BEQUEST

BY

ANNE BEALE

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"FAY ARLINGTON," "THE PENNANT FAMILY,"
"ROSE MERVYN," "IDONEA,"
&c., &c.

"Truth, goodness, honour, harmony, and love,
The richest bounty of indulgent Heaven."
THOMSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SQUIRE LISLE'S BEQUEST.

CHAPTER I.

QUIZ.

LEONARD had been two or three days in the country, having come direct to Lisle. He had been warmly welcomed there, even his aunt seeming glad to see him after his long absence, and his uncle receiving him with real affection. He had not yet paid the Dallimores a visit, and his going thither, as he had intended, from Fontainebleau Cottage was overruled by the information that the young people

were expected there that same afternoon, to five o'clock tea. Consequently, Monsieur d'Angère and he went for a walk while madame took her siesta, and Aveline laid the tea in the dining-room. Monsieur wished Leonard to revisit the plaisance, and in so doing they passed the room in which Aveline was busy, and peeped into the bow-window.

'Is she not a little angel?' whispered monsieur, as they stood for a moment watching her movements.

'Without wings?' laughed Leonard, as he remarked how intent she was on her work.

The store-room and china-closet were in the passage outside the dining-room, and she flitted from one to the other, now bearing cups and saucers, anon preserves, cakes, fruit—all the delicacies that Aunt Amicia was in the habit of preparing for

her nieces and other friends, the disposition of which now devolved on Aveline. It was evidently no easy task, for her fair young brow sometimes knitted over it, as she stood to contemplate her work.

'When are you going to shut that door, Aveline? The draught's enough to perish one. You've been long enough to lay a dozen teas,' sounded from the kitchen in a snappish voice.

'Dat is Lilyvite. She likes not the child,' whispered monsieur, as Aveline cautiously closed the dining-room door, and began to arrange some flowers that lay upon the sideboard. 'Listen. That is a song I taught her, "La Fleur! La Fleur!"' he added, as a low, almost tremulous, but sweet voice hummed an air. 'She always sings when she is troubled. Ma petite!'

At this call, Aveline started, turned,

and came to the window. Her face was radiant as she glanced from one to the other of her friends, and asked if they thought the table prettily arranged. They could only applaud; and Lilywhite's speech was forgotten.

When they returned from a walk to some of Leonard's old haunts, they found Mrs. Dallimore, her three daughters, and the youthful heir just arrived. Their greetings were overpowered by the shrill voice of Master Lisle, who was shouting, 'Aveline! Aveline! ma petite,' as loud as he could in the hall.

'Lisle darling, come and be introduced to Leonard Leigh,' said Mrs. Dallimore, peering through her spectacles into the hall; but Lisle was off in search of Aveline.

Meanwhile, Leonard and his quondam friends and playfellows shook hands and

looked at one another. They could scarcely believe their eyes. If Leonard was a fine young man of a presence sure to find favour with women, what of the Miss Dallimores? Isabella was still De Fortibus. A tall, large, beetle-browed, commanding young woman, fit only, her father assured her, 'to head a regiment.' Helen was still the plain one of the family, but with a sentimental air which seemed to imply that her beauties were of the soul, while Quiz—ah, Quiz! she was truly the belle, not only of the Dallimore family, but of the town and neighbourhood. As she and Leonard met and gazed at one another with surprise and, maybe, mutual admiration, he thought he had never seen a handsomer girl. Was she a blonde or a brunette? None could tell; for she had a profusion of auburn hair, beneath which rose pencilled eyebrows almost black; dark

eyes that some called hazel, some violet; a pale brown skin, and slightly aquiline features. She was tall and slight, and as she and Leonard stood a few moments, hand in hand, facing one another, it was no wonder that Madame d'Angère whispered confidentially to Mrs. Dallimore, 'What a handsome couple!' But Mrs. Dallimore bustled off in search of Lisle. All her maternal pride was centred in him.

She found him in the dining-room with Aveline, helping to put the finishing touches to the tea-table, and was greeted by the words,

'Now, Lisle, you must not put your fingers into the jam.'

'Indeed I will, if I like,' was the reply.

'Then I shall leave you. I will not be answerable for the tea-table, although I shall be blamed if it is not nice.'

'Why are you always cross with Lisle, Aveline?' broke in Mrs. Dallimore. 'Pray come to me, precious.'

'Aveline is never cross, mamma,' said Lisle, stoutly. 'I love her better than anyone else, and am going to marry her. She has promised to wait for me. Haven't you, Aveline?'

'Indeed I have not, Mrs. Dallimore,' laughed Aveline, conscious that the idea would displease the mother.

The host and hostess here entered, arm-in-arm, followed by the others. Madame d'Augère seated herself before the tea-service, monsieur at her side.

'I shall sit by you, ma petite,' shouted Lisle, and Leonard soon discovered that this boy whom he had left almost a baby still ruled his little world.

Everything he said was oracular; everything he asked for was given to him; he

devoured enough to make a giant ill, and he occupied Aveline's whole time between questions and demands. He was not a healthy-looking boy, and no wonder, for he was over-fed and over-indulged. Leonard, who sat between Isabella and Quiz, opposite him, was amused by his devotion to Aveline, and thought he showed very good taste.

'You succeeded in getting to Girton, after all, Isabella,' he said, in an interval of repose.

'I did. I have now something worth living for,' replied Isabella, who, during Leonard's absence, had been several times at Girton College, Cambridge.

'She has a science at the end of every finger, ten ologies—all, in short, but the Doxology,' put in Quiz. "You must be very clever if you can compete with her. None of the men in these parts can. Cap-

tain Moore declares she knows more of military tactics than he does.'

'Captain Moore's a muff!' screamed young Hopeful. 'Isn't he, Aveline? Ah! I know; I saw you and him together yesterday. I'll shoot him.'

All eyes were turned on Aveline, and she coloured, but was not abashed.

'Where could you have been, Lisle?' she said. 'I saw Captain Moore on the Mall only a few minutes in passing.'

'Did he say anything about the lawn-tennis party, Aveline?' asked Quiz.

'He said he hoped it would be fine,' was the reply.

Captain Moore was the eldest son of the Mr. Moore who was the tenant of the manor, and brother of Leonard's acquaintance of the Temple. His regiment was quartered at Parkhurst, and he and his brother-officers certainly 'made sunshine

in a shady place' for the young ladies. His advent had, besides, roused his invalid mother into party-giving, and the manor was just then the scene of much unaccustomed gaiety.

'I hate tennis!' said Isabella, decidedly. 'I cannot imagine people with souls flying about from corner to corner like maniacs with those implements in their hands.'

'I thought it was the right thing for souls to fly,' said Quiz. 'I hope you haven't forgotten your games, Leonard.'

'I hope not, for I am going in for everything at once, like the bank holiday-makers. Do you play, Aveline?' replied Leonard.

'I should think she did!' exclaimed Lisle. 'She is awfully clever at everything. She beats Quiz hollow. Now you know she does, Quiz!'

'I know nothing of the kind, sir,' inter-

posed Quiz, drawing herself up and glancing haughtily at Aveline.

'I can scarcely play at all,' said Aveline, quietly, as if in reply to Leonard's question.

'And yet the captain came expressly to say his mother particularly requested the pleasure of Aveline's company,' put in Monsieur d'Angère. 'She take quite a fancy to her when she call here the other day. It was because la petite knew to arrange her cushions and footstool, and reminded her of an only daughter dat she lost.'

'Ha, ha, ha! kiss, kiss, kiss, Aveline, ma petite!' chuckled Polly, who had been listening all this time with her head on one side.

'I suppose you won't take her, sister Amicia,' whispered Mrs. Dallimore. 'I think you must draw a line some-

where, and everybody knows her history.'

'Oh! yes, it is arranged,' replied Madame d'Angère, nonchalantly pouring out a cup of tea.

'A family arrangement in autumnal hues,' said Quiz, sarcastically. 'Dull enough! Mrs. Moore has organised a gathering of the clan of Lisle. She thinks it would be so nice for all the aunts and cousins to meet in the old place. She is an American, with aristocratic notions, and likes everything ancient.'

'She is in her right place, then,' laughed Leonard. 'There is antiquity enough, dead and alive, at Lisle. Old Biles must be a hundred, and the church is of time uncertain.'

'I'll turn it all inside out, when I'm of age,' cried Lisle, swelling himself out, at which all the company laughed.

Leonard listened, and wondered. He

had almost forgotten what was the staple gossip, and, as by degrees all the news of the day was discussed, he realised the difference between town and country life. The recollection of his chamber in the Temple was not unpleasant to him, though he fully enjoyed his surroundings.

Almost before tea was over, Lisle insisted on carrying off Aveline, when a tolerably free discussion ensued, concerning the suitability of her visit to the manor. The Dallimore ladies considered it a very doubtful proceeding, and Quiz especially waxed exceedingly warm on the subject.

'Perhaps Mrs. Moore does not know that she was actually in the Union and the Blue School, and that you took her first as a little servant, Aunt Amicia. Her getting familiar with us by degrees is quite different from her being intro-

duced into society. Don't you think so, Leonard?'

'I—I—am not a competent judge,' stammered Leonard at this unexpected appeal. 'Besides, I am only on the outskirts of society myself. I suppose I, as a lawyer's clerk, can only enter the sacred arena under cover of my uncle the vicar.'

'How absurd you are! I forgot that Aveline was your protégée.'

'Just so, Quiz. Do they still call you by that appropriate name? Yes—well then, my protégée and I being both paupers, must do as our superiors bid us. Do you remember your old game, "Ladies before, to go to the ball. Servants behind, to wait in the hall"?'

'Ha, ha! mon ami Léonard, I have watched Quiz play it many times. She made the grande dame to perfection, and

did imagine the train and the fan, while la petite, she always placed herself obediently behind.'

'Of course she did. People should maintain their proper position. Aveline would make a good pupil-teacher, if her head would stand the examination,' said oracular Isabella.

'There's the rub,' said Leonard. 'We have the small advantage of physical strength over you ladies.'

'Brute force!' supplied Isabella. 'I should have thought that you would have been more enlightened, Leonard.'

'We are come to a pass!' ejaculated madame. 'I expect to see Isabella in a wig and gown. She has a taste for the law. Apropos of gowns,' said Madame d'Angère, with a yawn, 'I am thinking of giving Aveline my green-silk for the party at the manor.'

'It is so beautifully trimmed, aunt, and has such a train! It will be splendid,' interrupted Quiz, who was alive to anything that might make Aveline ridiculous.

'I hope you will not repent making so much of that girl, sister. I wonder where she and Lisle are. It is time to leave,' said Mrs. Dallimore.

Leonard volunteered to go in search of the truants, and found them seated under a tree in the garden. Aveline was telling Lisle a fairy-tale, and Leonard was struck with the intent faces of reciter and listener. He wrote them on his mind, as he often did scenes that impressed him, with a view to future pen-and-ink sketches. If Leonard Leigh was still 'unknown to fame,' Davenport was gradually acquiring popularity. He delivered his message, and the trio returned together to the house.

'Is not Lisle a troublesome friend?' he asked, when the boy strayed for a moment from Aveline's side.

'No; I am fond of him. And monsieur and madame are relieved when he is with me,' she replied, and then added, 'You will be at this party at the manor? We shall meet there. I thought I would rather not go till you came. Now I shall like it very much indeed.'

The candid light of truth shot through the eyes that were uplifted to Leonard's, and a childlike trustfulness spoke in the voice and words.

During his brief absence, many had been the comments made on him; but all were in his favour. The ladies united in declaring him to be 'a perfect gentleman —exceedingly handsome,' and his poverty was forgotten in his appearance and manners, which were certainly in his favour.

He was no longer dependent, therefore that crime of his youth was ignored or forgotten.

He was a shrewd observer, and, watching the leave-takings that succeeded, he drew his own conclusions as to Aveline's recognised status. He knew the Dallimores were good sort of people enough, but not above the petty jealousies of a circumscribed existence, and they did not approve of this quasi-adoption of a stranger where heretofore their own family had been paramount. Aveline stood at the gate with her protectors to see off their guests, and seemed to receive their varied adieux as matters of course.

'Mind you study that book on competitive examinations,' said Isabella, as she shook hands. 'There are many subjects you could go in for.'

'Better think of the arrangement of the

green dress,' said Quiz, sweeping past with a pat on her shoulder.

'I will tell you more about that another time,' whispered Helen, confidentially, kissing her.

'I shall have the last kiss. What right have you to kiss her, you nasty Helen?' cried Lisle, springing up to Aveline's neck and nearly dragging her down.

'Lisle darling, where are you?' said Mrs. Dallimore, who had forgotten her altogether until she saw her thus embraced. 'Aveline, you should not let Lisle be so brusque.'

'She must; she can't help it,' shouted the heir.

Leonard waited to shake hands with her, and, as he did so, she said ingenuously, her eyes fixed on his,

'Do you remember when we parted here last? I was then a little Blue School

girl, and now—' she glanced at Monsieur and Madame d'Angère, who were close by.

'She is our adopted child,' supplied monsieur.

Leonard hurried down the hill after the Dallimores, and the little party of the cottage stood to watch them.

'I always said Léonard would be a grand man some day,' ejaculated monsieur, ecstatically.

'He is very elegant, and his manners quite refined,' rejoined madame, one hand above her brow, the other holding her eyeglass.

'He is the same, and yet different,' sighed Aveline.

'Now we will settle about the dress for to-morrow; we must have your opinion, mon Alphonse.'

The trio adjourned to madame's boudoir. As she affected everything French,

she so called her sleeping apartment, and expected everyone else to do the same.

'Thou hast thy plaisance, I my boudoir,' she said to her Alphonse.

The green silk was produced. It was much beflounced and trimmed with lace and ribbons, and Aveline shuddered slightly.

'Leave us, mon Alphonse, for five minutes,' ordered madame.

Unfortunately or fortunately, according to circumstances, madame's dresses fitted Aveline with slight alteration, and generally she was permitted to make this at will. But here was a fashionable dress ready to hand. It was tried-on at once, and she stood before a muslin-draped cheval-glass, a much-adorned doll.

'Ha, ha! She look like a rose in a laurel-bush,' laughed monsieur, when recalled.

His wife was offended, and he qualified his opinion.

'I mean, ma mie, that she look not so well as you in that robe.'

'Oh no, dear madame,' pleaded the oppressed Aveline. 'May I wear the pretty white alpacca instead? I feel—I feel too grand in this beautiful silk.'

'That is just what I desire,' said madame. 'We must make the alterations at once, so that it may not be recognized.'

'I am afraid there will not be time, dear madame. You will take Doux-Doux and Frou-Frou?'

'Of course I shall.'

'I must wash them at once. Then there is your own dress to be arranged, and monsieur's hair.'

'I think we may accomplish it all, Aveline.'

Here the reader must be let into a secret, gradually divulged to Aveline, and only suspected by the rest of the world. Madame d'Angère insisted on curling the hair of her devoted Alphonse before all state occasions, a process to which he submitted with French politeness, not, perhaps, unflavoured by vanity; for he had been always noticeable for his luxuriant curls, and it is hard to lose, as we decline in life, the graces that distinguished our ascent. The office of *friseuse* was sometimes delegated to Aveline; hence her allusion to it.

Happily, she saw nothing ridiculous in either of her benefactors; she loved them, and knew them to be good; so, when Quiz would occasionally ridicule their oddities, she always defended them.

'If it were not for Mr. Leonard, I should wish to stay at home,' she thought,

as, obedient to the orders of her benefactress, she prepared to make the necessary alterations in the green-silk.

It must be confessed that she set about the task unwillingly. Her taste in dress, as in most other matters, was pure and simple, and the contemplation of the flounces, puffings, ribbons, and various trimmings of the elaborate costume in which she was to appear, sadly disturbed her mind.

CHAPTER II.

'A MAN'S A MAN FOR A' THAT.'

'I WANT to know exactly how you have managed to live, Leonard,' said Mr. Churchhouse to his nephew the following morning.

'"Man wants but little here below," uncle,' was the dubious reply.

'Yes. But you have so positively declined my aid of late, that you must have discovered a mine somewhere.'

'The despised Muses have helped me a little. I also found some old coins in the davenport, which I turned to good

account; and, as you know, since Mr. Charles Conquest remembered that I had no money, he has given me a small salary as clerk. He is an absent man, and looking on me as articled—which I can scarcely call myself—he thought no more about me, and I fancy I have to thank Moore for opening his eyes.'

'But how are we to make a lawyer of you is now the question. You cannot go on for ever as clerk.'

'I do very well as I am, uncle, for the present. The future is in God's hands, and He will decide for me. Leave me for a year or so as I am.'

'When the girls are married, I shall be able to do more for you, Leonard. Conquest was right, when he told them he had brought them a lover a-piece and one over, for I really believe the two youngest sons have taken a fancy to Lucy and

Sophy. They are worthy lads and likely to get on, so they shall have my consent, though I fancy their mother aspires to the captain, who, after the fashion of his brethren, is likely to "love and ride away" when he leaves Parkhurst.'

Hereupon Leonard and his uncle discussed the Moores.

'I wish I knew who the squire's housekeeper really was, uncle,' said Leonard, abruptly, when they had exhausted the subject apparently.

'So does Mr. Moore,' replied Mr. Churchhouse. 'He has some unaccountable interest in her. We are never half an hour alone together without his asking some question concerning her which I cannot answer. And I understand that he fees Ratigan, and Biles, and every old person in the parish who knew her, and can give him any information about her.

I am afraid they trump up tales for his or their own benefit.'

'Papa! Leonard! We are all waiting,' here broke in Lucy, opening the library door.

They followed her into the hall, where Mrs. Churchhouse and Sophy were drawing on their gloves, preparatory to an adjournment to the manor and lawn-tennis. They all looked very bright in their summer costumes, and the two girls had a happy expectancy written on their faces.

'Now, Leonard, you will see us cousins together, and you will be able to say which you think the best-looking,' said Lucy.

'At any rate, we know which is the most successful,' whispered Leonard, and Lucy blushed.

'Of course Quiz is the handsomest,' said Mrs. Churchhouse, with slight irony, as

the party left the vicarage and walked to the manor.

They were the first arrivals, and were warmly welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Moore and their two youngest sons; the eldest was expected with some of his brother-officers. Mr. Moore was a tall, bronzed, grey-bearded man, who had been a successful colonist. He was a great talker and there was nothing he liked better than to secure a good listener. His wife was a bright little lady, though an invalid, whom he had picked up in America, and the two sons then present were ordinary young men, who had preferred returning to England and studying, the one for the bar, the other for the church, to remaining in the colonies. As there was plenty of money, their parents were well pleased with their decision.

'I have heard so much of you from my

son Stephen, that I have been quite anxious to make your acquaintance,' began Mr. Moore to Leonard. 'I hear you know the history of the manor, and, indeed, the whole island, and I want to ask you a hundred questions. I have been all over the world, and can take you from one quarter of the globe to another; but I know much more of New Zealand than the Isle of Wight, and am better acquainted with the aborigines of Australia than of my own country. Let me show you how I have been improving the manor for the young heir.'

Leonard resigned himself, philosophically, to a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Moore instead of a game of lawn-tennis. As his great object was to understand men and manners, he was glad to make the acquaintance of a genuine settler, and even bethought himself that it might lead to

his own emigration, which he had often considered a possible termination of his anxiety to gain an honest living. He, therefore, accompanied Mr. Moore on what that gentleman called, 'A walk round his dish.'

He perceived that they were not wanted. For the young men monopolized the young ladies at once, and the mothers began to gossip discreetly concerning them. He found that he had little to do but listen, and throw in a word now and again, when his companion pointed out his so-called 'improvements.' Doubtless, Mr. Moore was enriching the land, but Leonard feared he might, here and there, be destroying its picturesqueness. However, they wandered through undulating pasturage and leafy glades, every inch of which Leonard knew, while Mr. Moore took him in spirit all over the world.

'We have been nearly round our dish,' said that gentleman, when, having walked an hour or more, they found themselves on a slight eminence overlooking the manor. 'It would have taken me more hours than we have been minutes to ride over my land in Australia.'

'But you like the island?' asked Leonard.

'Sit down, and I will tell you.'

They sat down beneath a group of Scotch firs that crowned the little hill, and Leonard felt rather impatient when he perceived many moving specks of bright colour in the grounds around the manor.

'They are hard at work,' he said, pointing to the stately, gabled house, with its environment of trees, shrubberies, and lawns.

'We will join them as soon as I have

answered your question. Everything here is too small for my taste. There is scarcely space to breathe. I feel as if I was shut in, and couldn't get out. But the air has done my wife good, and the boys are likely to find capital partners; so we haven't come down here for nothing. You knew the old squire better than most people, I hear. Did he ever say anything to you about a Miss Cunninghame, who lived with him? I knew something of her before she went abroad.'

'No; but she has always interested me. The strangeness of her life and death, I mean,' said Leonard, forgetting the specks of colour below in a new interest.

'I would give the half of my fortune to find out what happened to her after she left the manor,' exclaimed Mr. Moore, excitedly.

'Ah! that would be the missing link,'

responded Leonard. 'I don't mean Darwin's,' he added, with a laugh as if he had said more than he intended.

'What missing link, then?' asked Mr. Moore.

'That between the departure and death of Miss Cunninghame,' replied Leonard, with some hesitation. 'I have certainly heard, somehow, that when she left the manor she resided either at Bath or Bristol.'

'Ha! that is something to work upon. Between you and me, she brought me to to Lisle. I should never have come to the manor had she not lived here. You will not mention this. I feel instinctively that you are a young fellow to be trusted, and, as you are interested in the story, I don't mind telling you my secret. I may depend upon you?'

'As upon yourself. I will name the subject to no one without your permission.'

'Well, then, Miss Cunninghame was my half-sister. We had two fathers, but the same mother. She was a few years my senior, and, when our mother married my father, he adopted her as his own daughter and treated her as such. I, too, loved her dearly. She was very handsome, but I think wilful and spoilt. My father, who was a medical man, died when I was about fifteen, leaving us very badly off. She resolved to take the first situation that offered, and, much against our mother's will, went as maid to Mrs. Lisle. Shortly after this, our mother died also, and I went into the merchant service. This took me to Australia, where I remained to seek and find a fortune. At first my sister and I corresponded regularly, but by degrees she ceased to write altogether, and when at last I wrote to Mr. Lisle to inquire about her, I received an ungracious

reply, informing me that she had left the manor. Since my return, I have understood that she came back here to die.'

Mr. Moore paused and looked at Leonard. He was listening attentively, indeed his very soul seemed in his eyes.

'I think you know more of this than you allow,' continued Mr. Moore, who was a shrewd observer. 'I repeat that I would give half my fortune to clear up the mystery of my sister's life and death.'

'I have in my possession some old letters, which I believe relate to her,' returned Leonard, with a touch of the astute and evasive lawyer. 'When I return to town I will look into them, and if you will call on me at my, or rather, at Mr. Conquest's Chambers, I will tell you about them. Perhaps you may help me to make wrong right.'

'Thank you. I know not why I con-

fided in you. It must have been instinct,' said Mr. Moore.

'Or the instinctive guiding of an unseen hand,' returned Leonard, rising. 'Perhaps we had better join the party, as it is getting quite late.'

They hurried down the slope, across a velvety meadow full of cows, through a long shrubbery, and finally to a tennis-court, new to Leonard.

'My sons made this for the young ladies,' laughed Mr. Moore. 'It has been really a "court" for them all.'

He hurried to greet his guests, while Leonard stood a moment on the outskirts to contemplate the scene. The game itself, the picturesque costumes, the embroidered aprons, the old manor-house, the surrounding downs pleased his fancy, and he at once distinguished Quiz as the most elegant and graceful figure of the Wat-

teau-like picture. She was playing, but, perceiving him, came towards him.

'Here you are at last, Leonard. I have been looking for you all the afternoon. Why did you let that old Moore carry you off? I see he has already talked you to death,' she said, her right hand in his, her left holding the extended bat.

'I have strength left for half a dozen games,' he replied, as she hurried away. 'How very handsome she is!' he mused, as he watched her in full activity.

He sauntered in and out amongst his old friends. Major Dallimore and Monsieur d'Angère held him long in discourse, so that it was some time before he could reach a knot of young people who were alternately watching the game and joining in it. Isabella and Helen were amongst them, but he did not see Aveline.

'Where is Aunt Amicia?' he asked, carelessly, of Isabella.

'Sitting with Mrs. Moore under the trees—covered with insects by this time, I should think. I hate earwigs almost as much as lawn-tennis and other inane games. One was sent into the world for something better than to amuse oneself.'

'To learn scepticism at Girton, perhaps?' suggested Leonard, who had fallen in with a clever female B.A. or so, who professed to believe in nothing.'

'The usual masculine prejudice, I see!' said Isabella, as Leonard wandered off in the direction of Mrs. Moore.

She was surrounded by friends, seated for the most part on garden-chairs, and all laughing at some joke of Monsieur d'Angère's. He looked in vain for Ave-

line. He thought he should certainly see a green silk; but he was disappointed. He felt intuitively that it would not be wise to inquire for her, so he shook hands with his friends, and, leaning against a tree, watched the game and joined in their conversation.

It was perhaps strange that Leonard Leigh, having neither position nor fortune, should yet, without any effort on his part, be treated with a consideration that was as unaccountable to himself as to everyone else. The fact was that he was handsome, had good manners, was talented, and knew how to hold his own without assumption. Everyone said he had the very cut of a barrister, whatever that may be; and if they chanced to make further inquiries, and to learn that he was only a clerk in the office of Mr. Conquest, they merely took it for granted that he

chose to walk step by step through all the gradations of law. His motto was Burns', 'A man's a man for a' that,' and so, clerk or no clerk, he took his place among men.

'Leonard, would you mind just going down to the pond and bringing back Lisle?' whispered Mrs. Dallimore, rising suddenly from a chair close to where he was standing.

'I will try, but he probably will not come,' he replied, and threaded two or three well-known paths to a thicket, in the centre of which lay a sheet of water. As he approached it, he heard Master Lisle shouting lustily, and, when he reached the tree-guarded bank at one end of the pond, he perceived that he made one of a trio who were paddling about in a boat at the other. His companions were a gentleman in a grey suit and a young lady in white, who wore a broad hat with

a wreath round it. Leonard watched them skirt the pond until an island in its centre hid them from view, then waited until they should near the spot where he stood. He loved the place well, and used to know where the wild ducks nested, and a stray heron occasionally laid an egg. He knew also the song and cry of every bird that swelled the choruses in the surrounding trees, and the names and nature of many an insect that buzzed and flitted over the water. A superb dragon-fly outspread its transparent blue wings before him where he stood, and recalled the days when he laid up a store of Nature's honey in the cells of his mind, from which he had already drawn sweets for his literary labours. The sedges, waterlilies, forget-me-nots, the leaping trout, the casual sunbeam, the blue gloom of the far end—all reminded him of his boyhood, and he

found himself wondering what the riotous child in the boat would do with the ancient manor, the lawny downs, the silent pool. His wonderings were interrupted by the words, in a severe, manly voice,

'If you don't sit down, sir, you'll upset the boat.'

'I want to,' was Master Lisle's reply.

The next moment the boat was in sight and paddled up to a small landing-stage. Leonard saw the boy stand on its edge and take a leap for the bank. In doing so he nearly tumbled into the water. Leonard ran towards him and caught him just in time.

'Serve him right,' ejaculated the oarsman, who was Captain Moore, and was giving his hand to the lady.

'I don't care. I'm not hurt,' cried the heir, half terrified, half boastful.

'You deserved a ducking, sir,' said Cap-

tain Moore, who was much put out, and not by nature very good-tempered.

'I say you shan't have Aveline,' shouted Lisle, and Leonard perceived that Aveline was the young lady in white with the wreath of wild roses round her hat, and her hand was in Captain Moore's.

'I have been looking for a green silk with many flounces,' he said, as he advanced to greet her, feeling at the same time displeased that his protégée should be rowing almost alone with a military man.

'It required so much alteration and could not be finished in time, so I asked to be allowed to wear this instead,' she replied, with a flush of pleasure.

Leonard did not venture to say how much more becoming he considered the simpler dress, but said, instead, that he had come in search of Lisle at Mrs. Dallimore's request.

That 'heir of all the Lisles' took Aveline's hand, while the young men placed themselves on either side of the pair, and thus they proceeded to rejoin the party they had left.

'You had a near miss, Master Lisle,' said Leonard. 'That grand velvet costume, as the men-milliners call it, would have been spoilt for ever if I had not come up just in time.'

'I shouldn't have cared,' replied the boy, 'I can buy another. I wanted to upset Captain Moore. But he shan't have Aveline. Nobody shall have her but me. You aren't half as rich as I am, Captain Moore, and you have nothing at all, Leonard Leigh: I heard ever so many people say so.'

'Lisle, do be quiet,' pleaded Aveline, hurrying on.

'He deserves a good flogging, and if I

was his father he should get it,' said the captain, with an ominous frown. 'We were as nearly as possible upset through the obstinacy of a spoilt brat.'

'Aveline says you shouldn't call names,' cried Lisle, facing the captain and doubling his fists.

'Come with me, young man,' exclaimed Leonard, laughing in spite of himself at the would-be pugilist, but seizing his hands and dragging him off.

A roar and struggle ensued, which Aveline quelled by a few decided words, and the boy allowed himself to be led by her, while still casting ominous looks at the young men.

'Una and the lion,' said Leonard, glancing at the flushed face of the conqueror.

'I'd like to be a lion,' grumbled Lisle. 'Then I'd eat up Captain Moore, and have Aveline all to myself.'

'Do make haste, Lisle. Your mother will blame me for the delay,' whispered Aveline.

The boy needed no further incentive, but, with a 'No, she sha'n't,' dragged her on as persistently as he had before striven to hold her back.

CHAPTER III.

LAWN TENNIS.

VARIOUS were the remarks passed on Aveline and her cavaliers when they appeared in the tennis-court. The young ladies spoke slightingly, and the old ones shook their heads. The young men strove for an introduction to the heroine of the moment; the old ones said she was a very rosebud of a girl. But Madame d'Angère took her aside, and asked, irritably, why she had absented herself with two young men, saying that such manners were not the fashion when

she was young, and she could not allow them.

'Lisle dragged me down to the water, dear madame,' explained Aveline, 'and, while we were looking at the lilies, Captain Moore came. Lisle jumped into the boat, and declared he would not get out unless we got in also. We were obliged to obey, and I am thankful we were not all upset. Mr. Leonard came in search of Lisle, and that was why I actually had three gentlemen.'

Leonard overheard this little conversation, as well as what passed between Lisle and Mrs. Dallimore. The indulgent mother was making disparaging remarks on Aveline to Mrs. Moore, when Master Lisle interrupted her with—

'It wasn't Aveline's fault that I nearly tumbled into the river. I wished to upset the boat to drown Captain Moore, because

he wants to marry her, and she has promised to wait for me. I can't bear him. He is an old, red-headed, cross ——'

'Hush! hush! my darling,' broke in Mrs. Dallimore, laying her hand on the mouth of Master Hopeful. 'He doesn't mean it, Mrs. Moore.'

'I daresay not,' responded that lady, smiling, but looking round in search of her son.

'But I do,' shouted Lisle.

The captain was, unfortunately, hovering near Aveline at the moment, waiting for an opportunity to speak to her when madame's lecture was over, and Mrs. Moore discovered him. Leonard had not time, however, to make further observations, for he saw Quiz approaching, and in another moment the coterie under the big tree was broken up.

'Leonard, you must have a game with

me, for auld lang syne.' 'Miss Roone, you have not played yet. You must positively be my partner in this game,' sounded simultaneously from Quiz and Captain Moore.

So Leonard and Quiz played against the captain and Aveline, and the two former won the game.

'I am so sorry you had such a bad partner, Captain Moore,' said Aveline. 'I have so little practice, that I ought not to play at all, though I like it.'

'I desire no other partner. We will go in for the best two out of three,' said the captain; and they began again.

'Take off your hat, Aveline,' shouted Lisle, and, suiting the action to the word, he unconsciously removed the broad-brimmed obstruction.

She had no time for remonstrance, and she and the captain won the next game.

But their adversaries got the third; and Quiz said to Leonard that she thought, with a little practice together, he and she might challenge all England.

'Aunt and monsieur quite spoil Aveline,' she remarked, as Madame d'Angère seized upon Lisle, and rescued the hat. 'She certainly has the beauty of a doll, but that is no excuse for bringing her forward.'

'Animate a very beautiful doll, Quiz, and you may be right; or take the soul out of Aveline, and you would not be far wrong,' returned Leonard.

'I forgot she was your protégée,' said Quiz. 'But, were I she, I would not enter society under false colours.'

At this juncture the party adjourned to the house for refreshments. All that wealth and hospitality could devise was spread in the large and ancient dining-

room, and, when Leonard and Quiz reached it with the others, they could but remark on the new *régime* as compared with that of the squire. He found her a place at the long oaken table, drawn out to its full dimensions, and, while fetching her tea, perceived that he was instantly replaced by several other men, all anxious to serve the belle of the island. He made himself useful to other less fortunate young ladies, and finally anchored behind Helen, who was not, like her sister, 'the admired of all admirers.'

'I really think Captain Moore is in love with Aveline,' she said, sententiously. 'How nice it would be if she were to marry!'

'Why, she is only a child, Helen.'

'She will be seventeen her next birthday, and Quiz eighteen, and I twenty, and——'

'Stop there, if you please!' cried Isabella, who was seated near. 'If I have a weakness, it is my age, and, I must confess, a table groaning with good things like this.'

Leonard thought it must be pleasant to 'use hospitality without grudging' both to rich and poor, and glanced with satisfaction, unmixed with envy, at the feast. Of one thing he was convinced; if his cousins, Sophy and Lucy, had been hitherto in doubt concerning their future, they were so no longer, for it was impossible to misunderstand the engrossing nature of their intercourse with the younger Moores. The captain had transferred his attentions to Quiz, and Aveline had more than she could do to keep Lisle in order and respond to the jokes of Monsieur d'Angère, seated next to her; so Leonard devoted himself to the elder ladies, and Mrs. Moore

was heard to say 'he was the nicest young man she had seen since she left America.'

When the ladies had eaten and drunken as much or more than was good for them, and the gentlemen had humbly partaken of what they left, which was enough and to spare, there was an adjournment to the tennis-court for one more game. Leonard saw Aveline standing alone in the hall, and went to her.

'Have you seen the carvings?' he asked. 'No? Then come with me.'

He took her first back to the dining-room to show her the carved panels of the wainscot, the antique chairs and fine old mantelpiece, then to the drawing-room, where was a chimney-piece carved by Grinling Gibbons, of magnificent workmanship. Indeed, Lisle Manor was celebrated for its valuable oak carving, and crests, monograms, scriptural pieces of

great antiquity, birds and flowers were scattered profusely on wall, ceiling, and staircase.

'I love antiquities,' said Aveline, enthusiastically. 'I find that my own name is one. I wonder why I was called Aveline? I was reading in an old history of the island that the lady of the Wight, Isabella de Fortibus had two daughters, named Avice and Aveline, and that Aveline survived her brothers and sisters, and was heiress of the island, and married Edmund, second son of Henry III.'

'You know we used to call Isabella Dallimore, De Fortibus,' laughed Leonard, 'so she is your historical mother.'

The word 'mother,' as connected with herself, quenched Aveline's momentary enthusiasm, and her expressive eyes grew sad.

'I wish I could see the old church again

where I came with my dear mamma, when I first met you,' she said, with a sort of eager impulse, looking at Leonard.

'That is easily accomplished,' he replied. 'I will take you there.'

'Perhaps madame would be displeased,' she said, timidly.

'I think not. They look on me as a sort of brother or protector of yours, and, if we go down the drive, we shall be unperceived by the—Tennisonians, I was going to say.'

Aveline shuddered as they hurried down the avenue where she had met the squire's funeral, and the scene returned to her memory as if it had been but of yesterday. She thought of her poor mother, and of how she had followed the mournful procession to the church. All the little incidents of that day came back to her, and when they reached the sacred

edifice her eyes were full of tears, and Leonard reproached himself for bringing her. But she preceded him into the church, hurrying down the aisle towards the scene of what she called her 'fatal sleep.' It was, however, changed; thanks to the exertions of Mr. Churchhouse, liberally seconded by Mr. Moore and others, the church had been reseated, and presented a very different aspect from that which Aveline so vividly recalled. The worm-eaten panels and faded curtains of the squire's pew had disappeared, and the cushions on which she had slumbered with Toby were nowhere to be seen. She stood, bewildered, glancing first round the neat and seemly interior, then at Leonard.

'Pious zeal and money combined accomplish much,' he said. 'They have done what the squire would not do. The old

times were good, but the modern ones are better, though Biles doesn't think so; do you, Biles?' he added to the sexton.

'Nothing but changes, Measter Leonard. All flesh is grass,' he ejaculated; and Leonard, wishing to avoid worldly dissertations in a place which he held sacred, led the way back into the churchyard.

Here Aveline took Biles by the hand, and, gazing into his face with tearful eyes said,

'Do you remember me, Mr. Biles?'

'Noa, I can't say as I do; but you be a'most as pretty as Miss Cunninghame, and summat like her. Perhaps you'd like to see her grave?'

Biles had turned the squire's will to account, for he had made a small fortune with the tourists, out of the two mounds of earth which he had raised over his and his housekeeper's remains, and which he kept

as smooth as the turf of the surrounding downs. He had also planted cypress-trees at their head and feet, so that no spot in the whole churchyard was so attractive as this, particularly when Biles gave the mysterious history of the squire's last will and testament.

'Who'd a thought it, Measter Leonard?' mused Biles, as the trio stood looking at the graves. 'And the old place turned topsey-turvey by thay voreigners; and boys and maaids hopping about like thay Joans at a wake, wi' short spades in their hands, where Madam Lisle used to walk so stately! But, as I says, "All flesh is grass."'

'Do you remember finding me asleep in the church the day of the squire's funeral, and my poor mamma standing to listen and watch?' asked Aveline, eagerly.

'To be zure an' I do. Be you that

little gurl? Well, you be growd,' answered Biles.

'Where are Dan Lane and Toby?' asked Aveline.

'Wull, Dan a' made a vool o' hisself an' got married, an' Toby, he be a'most past work now, like Joe Biles. But he ain't got no legacy to keep un,'—here Biles chuckled. 'An' I hear tell as your mamma drowned herself, and Miss Amicia as war, took you up. Well, I never zeed a partier little gurl.'

This speech overcame Aveline's remaining self-restraint, and she sank down on the squire's grave, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed pitifully.

'Don't 'ee, now, don't 'ee, there's a good gurl,' said Biles, while Leonard knelt down on one knee at her side and laid his hand protectingly on her shoulder.

'I should not have brought you, Aveline,' he whispered.

'Oh! yes, yes; I am glad. I shall be better directly,' she sobbed, and rose with a strong effort at composure. 'I don't believe my dear mamma is drowned. She will come back some day,' she added, with an appealing glance at Biles.

'To be zure she wull, my dear; leastways, you know, we shall all meet again up yonder,' rejoined Biles, pointing heavenward.

A radiant smile overspread Aveline's face as she gave her hand to the old man, with the words,

'Yes, I am sure of that; only it seems very long to wait.'

'Long to look forrard to, but short to look back upon after four score year, my dear. Measter Leonard and you 'a got the world before 'ee. I hopes as you'll "do your duty in that state o' life in which it hath pleased God to place 'ee." You be

as fine a young couple as ever I zet my eyes upon.'

'I hope we shall, Biles,' said Leonard, and Aveline smiled through her tears.

The evening sun gilded down and hamlet as they left the churchyard, and the calm glory of the scene gradually stilled Aveline's unrest. Neither of them spoke, but Leonard's kind heart was moved with pity for her. When they reached the manor, he took her to the library, where he had been wont to see the squire, and bade her remain there, while he went in search of her protectors.

'I will say you are not well,' he began.

'Oh, no! tell them the truth. They will understand,' she replied, and she was left alone.

It was not her habit to give way, and she was much distressed with herself, though she trusted Leonard implicitly.

She dried her eyes, and gradually recovered her usual look and manner; but strange visions haunted her. Her poor mother was everywhere, and, as she sat in that quaint old library, it seemed peopled with the ghosts of the departed. Unconsciously, Leonard had seated her in the chair in which the squire used to sit—a carved, high-backed, red leather-cushioned chair, and from it she surveyed as in a dream the musty volumes collected by generations of Lisles, and filling shelves, every panel of which was elaborately carved. A huge mantel-shelf and Gothic window filled the spaces where books were not, and all the furniture was ancient as the house. She alone was of this nineteenth century, and a sweet contrast she made, as she sat there, timid, expectant, inquisitive, forgetting her late grief in wonder at her surroundings.

'Where is she, ma petite?' interrupted her reverie, and Monsieur d'Angère bustled in. 'Qu'est-ce que c'est? You are ill, mon enfant?'

'Oh! no, dear monsieur; only weak and foolish as I used to be when you were so kind,' said Aveline, hurrying to meet him.

Madame d'Angère and Mrs. Moore followed, and more inquiries ensued. Madame was annoyed, Mrs. Moore pitiful; and the latter would have had Aveline remain the night at the manor, but the proposal was negatived. In bounded Lisle with voluble reproaches because Aveline had left him, and she had more than she could do to account for her conduct. She did so, however, simply and truthfully; and, just as she was saying that she had not seen the old church since the day that she had been there with her mother, Captain Moore walked in.

Meanwhile the party was breaking up. Leonard had remained without, to avert observation from Aveline, having just whispered to Monsieur d'Angère, who was looking for her. His uncle joined him, and said, quietly,

'You had better not bring that poor child into prominent notice. All the girls are jealous of her beauty, which all the young men admire. I doubt if d'Angère doesn't make too much of her for Aunt Amicia's peace of mind. I almost wish she had remained at the Blue School. She is in a false, uncertain position.'

'So she was there, uncle; but she is only a child,' replied the seven-years-older Leonard.

Quiz came up, and Mr. Churchhouse walked off.

'Aveline is always making scenes,' she began. 'She goes in for the languishing.

Are you of a sympathetic nature, Leonard? You used to be good-natured, but not a ninny. What with the intolerable spooning of Sophy and Lucy, and Aveline's having carried off Captain Moore and you —she is sly enough, I can tell you—the afternoon has been as dull as old Moore himself.'

'You have no cause of complaint, Quiz. Why, you have had the world at your feet. Look when and where I would, you had a bevy of officers round you, and I am given to understand, by the learned in such matters, that the soldier is first in love as in war.'

'You used to be my friend,' said Quiz, with irritation.

'I, my dear Quiz! I was nobody in those days—I am less than nobody now!'

Quiz gave him a reproachful glance. If

she had 'the world at her feet,' she wanted him also: whether from vanity or old affection, who should say?

'Nobody!' she repeated, musingly. 'You would not like me, or anyone else, to say that of you. We are both ambitious, Leonard, or we are nothing. I hate mediocrity—so do you. Do not contradict me. We cannot change our nature in five years or so. We chafe at the boundaries of circumstance, and must emancipate ourselves. I sincerely hope you will not belie yourself.'

Leonard scarcely understood the defiant manner of the beautiful girl who stood beside him; but he thought he had never seen anyone so grandly handsome. Indeed, they were a remarkable pair, both as regarded personal appearance and general bearing, and as they remained a few moments, unconscious of observation, the

loiterers in the tennis-court pointed them out as 'certainly the best-looking couple in the island.'

CHAPTER IV.

MONSIEUR D'ANGERE'S PATRIMONY.

AN amazing letter awaited Monsieur d'Angère on his return from the manor. The drive home had not been cheerful. He had been more engaged with Aveline than with the pony he had undertaken to drive home in the small carriage hired for the occasion, and his wife was offended. Of course she had occupied the seat by his side, and Aveline the back one, but he had turned round so frequently to inquire for his petite that madame had declared she was quite terri-

fied lest he should upset the carriage from sheer inattention to the reins.

'A thousand pardons, ma mie,' he had said, and Aveline had returned, crestfallen, to the villa, feeling that she had done nothing but transgress all the afternoon.

But the amazing letter set everything to rights. It lay on the drawing-room table when they entered, and monsieur took it up immediately.

'France! Fontainebleau!' he exclaimed, turning it over. 'But I have not my lunettes!' he added, sitting down composedly, and taking out his snuff-box. He emptied his pockets, but the spectacles were nowhere to be found.

'You must have lost them, mon ami, when turning round to Aveline and nearly upsetting the carriage,' said Madame, severely. 'Aveline, nothing is so unladylike as to make scenes.'

'Dear madame, I will do better in future. I will look for the spectacles. Perhaps you did not take them, dear monsieur?'

'Perhaps not, ma petite.'

He took a pinch of snuff philosophically, while Aveline and Lilywhite ransacked the house.

'He's always losing something,' grumbled Lilywhite. 'I suppose you've had a fine time of it, Aveline?'

'I have not enjoyed it, Lilywhite. I would rather have been at home.'

'Bring the lamp. I will try without my glasses,' shouted monsieur. 'If I lose them I lose myself.'

Aveline brought the lamp, and monsieur opened the letter. But he could not decipher it without his spectacles. Madame tried, but she never read the cramped French writing fluently, and, after puzzling

out the first sentence, monsieur said, with unaccustomed vehemence,

'Give it to Aveline. Ma foi! that I should have lost my lunettes at such a moment.'

Madame, offended, passed the letter to Aveline. She read it with ease, for she had assisted Monsieur d'Angère in the arrangement of certain French manuscripts, and had been an apt pupil in the language.

'Impossible! That cannot be. The château of my ancestors. What remains from the revolution! The place of my birth! La Belle Vue de Fontainebleau!'

Such, and many similar ones, were the exclamations of Monsieur d'Angère, uttered in French, while Aveline read a letter which neither she nor madame fully understood. Before it was quite concluded, he burst into tears. Madame put her arms round

his neck, forgetful even of her point-lace sleeves, crying out,

'Alphonse! mon Alphonse! It is good news!'

'It is, ma bien aimée,' he answered.

Then he rose, took her hand, kissed her on both cheeks, and, as if presenting her at court instead of to the bewildered Aveline, said,

'Behold Madame la Chevalière d'Angère. You are now in your proper position, and I resume mine.'

Then he embraced her again.

Aveline stood apart, not knowing whether to remain or leave the room; but he did not forget her.

'Ma petite, thou shalt not be forsaken. Thou shalt share our fortunes,' he added, holding out his hand.

She took it and kissed it, saying,

'Dear monsieur, dear madame, I rejoice

with you. How happy you will be to visit Fontainebleau again.'

'Lilyvite, Lilyvite! go to that hired vehicle and see if I have left my lunettes, my spectacles, therein,' shouted Monsieur d'Angère at the top of his voice. 'Thou shalt henceforth have thine own voiture, ma femme. No more hired carriages; no more forced condescension; no more patronage of the poor teacher of languages! Thou hast shared my poverty, thou wilt share my prosperity. Mon Dieu! To see again my beloved Fontainebleau, our château, the palace, the forest! My Amicia! ma petite, my heart breaks with joy.'

This outburst was accompanied by gesticulations such as Madame d'Angère had never witnessed since he proposed for her, and she was alarmed.

'Sit down, mon Alphonse. Calm thyself. Bring his snuff-box, Aveline. Fetch

a glass of liqueur. Let the dogs in. They understand that something is taking place. I feel almost hysterical myself.'

They sat down side by side and hand in hand on the sofa. Loulou and Frou-Frou jumped on their knees. Aveline brought the liqueur, and gave each a tiny glassful, then she turned to leave the room.

'Go not away, ma petite. Read the letter again,' said monsieur.

'And slowly; for I understand nothing,' added madame. 'Translate it, Aveline.'

Again Aveline stood over the lamp, and carefully translated the letter. It was now madame's turn to be excited, and to utter her exclamations of delight, and little cries of astonishment, while her husband laughed, shrugged his shoulders, rubbed his hands, poured forth French expletives, and otherwise conducted him-

self much as if he were slightly insane; all of which brought a lump to Aveline's throat that endangered the clearness of her enunciation.

Before she had quite finished, Lilywhite returned. She had found the spectacles. She was taken aback by the appearance of the trio, and asked what was the matter.

'Lilyvite, I have regained my patrimony. I am a *chevalier d'honneur* once more, and your mistress is *la chevalière*.'

'What's that, master?'

'Well, it means Saar Alphonse and Lady d'Angère!'

'My! And must we say, your ladyship?'

'Possibly; but I can now read the letter myself.'

Monsieur d'Angère put on his spectacles, spread the wonderful epistle be-

neath the lamp, took an enormous pinch of snuff, and sat down. His wife placed herself by his side, and Aveline stood behind them.

The letter was to the effect that an estate at Fontainebleau which had belonged for generations to the family of the d'Angère, but which had been lost to them at the revolution, was restored by government, and he, being the sole remaining representative of the name, had only to go to France and take possession of it. The title of chevalier was also his by right.

It took some time to master the details of the letter, and Aveline went over and over again certain portions of it, until the whole was understood, and Monsieur d'Angère was able to reduce it to the comprehension of his wife. She was in a state of ecstasy, and continually expressed her

delight that her Alphonse would now be in the position which his 'great talents' had intended him for.

'We shall now visit France again. We shall see the boulevards, and the Champs Elysées, and the Bois, and those polite Frenchmen,' she cried, enthusiastically. 'You remember how they complimented me, Alphonse?'

'Hein! I forget nothing, ma mie. What should we have done without la petite at this crisis? She is a complete Frenchwoman. She will help you much.'

Aveline remarked that this little speech met with no response from Madame d'Angère, and that night, when at last they retired to rest, she lay long awake, wondering what her future would be. She made many plans, for she did not imagine she should continue with her present protectors under their altered circumstances,

and she resolved to undertake the first situation that offered.

'But,' she thought, 'I will consult Mr. Leonard. He is my friend, and will give me good advice. It might have been best, as Isabella Dallimore says, if I had continued at the Blue School, and become a pupil teacher. Still, I love them dearly, and, if only they will take me with them, I will—oh! I will be their servant, their slave.'

Truth to tell, she was that already—a willing bond-servant, for what with the pets, the dress-making, the household duties, the French readings, which were her one genuine recreation, and a hundred other petty occupations, she had no leisure. This was good, for willing work breeds contentment; and Aveline's prevented her brooding over her orphanhood. But now, she thought, such avocations

would be delegated to others. Madame would have her maid, monsieur his man, the dogs their groom. Although she had often, she grieved to think, secretly murmured at the flounces she unpicked, the furbelows she manufactured; although she had occasionally scolded the refractory dogs when washing them, and reproached the parrot for his hideous screams when cleaning his cage; although she had resented at heart Lilywhite's petty spite and jealousy, she yet felt wretched at the prospect of parting from any of the inmates of Fontainebleau Villa. And as to Monsieur and Madame d'Angère, it would break her heart to leave them. It would be only nigh to losing that mother whom she had so fondly loved. It was no wonder that she sobbed aloud when she reached this point in her meditations. There was a tap at her door, and the whispered words,

'What is the matter, ma petite?'

'Only a nightmare—a foolish terror, dear monsieur,' she replied, cheerfully, suppressing the grief.

'Have no fear, sleep well; thou art as our own child,' said the kind and happy Frenchman, returning to the side of his slumbering chevalière.

But when his good fortune was made public, as it was at once, many were the speculations concerning Aveline, together with the congratulations he received on all sides. Madame d'Angère's sisters and their families were naturally among the first to offer the latter, and to indulge in the former. They all examined their consciences as to their previous conduct to Madame d'Angère, and were obliged to confess that it had not been faultless. However, they resolved that it should be blameless in future, and

even Quiz decided that a chevalier d'honneur, with corkscrew curls, was much less ridiculous than a poor monsieur. They all made up their minds that Aveline would be no longer necessary, and discussed what was to become of her amongst themselves unreservedly, and with Madame d'Angère cautiously. They bore Aveline no particular ill-will, and were ready to give her a lift into a new situation; but they took it for granted she would quit her present one. Indeed, Mrs. Churchhouse went so far as to talk the matter over, not only at her own breakfast-table, where Leonard took part in the discussion, but also with her friend and gossip, Mrs. Moore.

That lady had taken a great fancy to Aveline, and, being of an impulsive nature, and fond of her own way, she wrote at once to Madame d'Angère saying that she

understood Miss Roone was likely to leave her when she and Monsieur d'Angère went abroad, and offering to receive her at the manor. She said that, as two of her sons were about to get married, and the third was seldom at home, she would be glad of so amiable a companion.

It happened that when this letter reached Madame d'Angère, Isabella and Quiz Dallimore were with her. She took them at once into her confidence.

'Mrs. Moore does not address me as Madame la Chevalière d'Angère,' she said, when they had read the missive.

'Those Americans are so ignorant, auntie; they know nothing of rank. But this seems a good opening for Aveline,' said Quiz.

'It would be her ruin. Apprentice her to the school of art, or let her work up for an examination; all girls should have

a trade or profession,' decided Isabella.

'But we have not made up our minds. Le chevalier has not yet concluded his arrangements,' returned madame, languidly arranging her handkerchief.

Quiz walked to the window to smother a laugh, and in the plaisance who should she see but Aveline and Leonard, apparently in earnest conversation. Green-eyed jealousy took possession of her. She turned with a flushed and angry face from the window, and said,

'Aveline has been raised above her position. Such girls are always sly, and she is bent on worming herself into the affections of all the men she comes near. She began as a child with Uncle Churchhouse and Leonard; she plays the same game with Monsieur d'Angère—the chevalier, I mean; she is at it with Captain Moore and others, and she even stoops to ingra-

tiate herself with Lisle, just because he is a boy. She cares for no woman living—not even for you, auntie, who have been so kind to her.'

'That is what Lilywhite says,' responded madame, who was always led by the last speaker.

'I think you are unjust,' put in Isabella, brusquely. 'It is not her fault if all the men admire her, and I say she is a very good sort of a girl, only she should be trained for something more useful than nursing pugs, and dawdling over elderly people. I hate injustice.'

'Isabella!—what do you mean?' asked madame, in her huffiest way.

'I mean that, since there are about a third more women than men in the world, and, therefore, they can't be all as lucky, or unlucky, as Sophy and Lucy, every woman should be trained to earn her living

like a man. I mean to earn mine, and trust neither to the Lord Chancellor nor to matrimony.'

'Bravo, Isabella de Fortibus!' exclaimed Leonard, entering as this speech concluded. 'But if the ladies compete with the men for all the prizes of life, and oust a good many of us—for they are very determined—we must emigrate in self-defence.'

'And the best thing you can do. But we were talking of Aveline.'

'Your protégée!' cried the angry Quiz, sarcastically.

Leonard glanced at her flushed, handsome face, and saw there was something amiss, but little guessed that he had caused it. He made no reply, for he had just been talking to Aveline, and advising her to leave herself entirely in the hands of Monsieur and Madame d'Angère, and to

show no anxiety about her future, until it was decided for her. He had left her quite happy.

Monsieur d'Angère came in, and he congratulated him and madame on their good fortune, to which monsieur replied, taking snuff between each sentence,

'You will come to Fontainebleau, mon ami Léonard, and you, Quiz, and you, Isabella—all of you must come. There will be room in the old château. Ma foi, it will be thirty-five year since I was there myself. But my heart will be ever in your Old England. It was here I met madame, and made many friends and—permit me—relations. I may now claim the parentage.'

This speech, and the presentation of his left hand to his wife, while he took snuff with his right, mollified the roused jealousy of his helpmate, and tended to soften her

feelings towards the unconscious Aveline.

Not only madame, but the rest of the party were aware of a change in his manner. Leonard especially noticed it, although it was almost imperceptible. There was already a certain dignity and decision that had been kept under, or hidden beneath assumed gaiety; and the consciousness of having once more a position in life appeared to give him assurance and to change the unknown refugee into the natural gentleman, unrestrained by the conventionalities of caste. He was lightened of a burden; for, as he afterwards told Leonard, he had felt as if he were acting a part, and that nobody believed in his name or patrimony, except his wife.

When they and Aveline were once more alone, he expounded his plans, his hopes, and many expectations. He had made up his mind to go to France as soon as

possible, and, without naming Aveline, seemed to infer that she would accompany them. He did not say so in as many words, but Aveline, who was not only quick-witted but sensitive, understood what he meant. She also perceived that madame purposely avoided including her in such schemes as she propounded, and began to think that she would be best in some other position. However, she remembered Leonard's advice, and strove to leave her future in higher hands. He had counselled her well; for, although he was shrewd enough to perceive that she was the object of much petty jealousy, he believed that such annoyance would cease were she alone with her protectors in another country.

CHAPTER V.

A FIRST QUARREL.

MADAME D'ANGERE was naturally fond of Aveline; but she was a selfish, weak woman, and ready to dislike any person or thing that interfered with her own interests. She very properly considered her husband as peculiarly part of herself, therefore she was prepared to discard all that tended to sever their united halves. The inconsiderate words of Quiz, and the well-considered whispers of Lilywhite were for her words and whispers of the Tempter. She was too weak

to withstand them; and, for the first time during her married life, she allowed the demon jealousy to creep into her singularly transparent nature. Hitherto, she and her Alphonse had jogged on evenly together, and no stumbling-stone had impeded their course, but then, they had not met with those terrible obstacles, riches or poverty.

Now that unexpected honour and wealth had fallen upon her path, she began to prance along, and would fain tread down all impediments, if only her Alphonse would prance with her. But he was not inclined to alter his pace. He knew that to do so would spill his snuff, rumple his shirt-frill, disarrange his curls, and otherwise interfere with his equanimity, and probably mar his digestion, so he took his altered estate easily. Or he would have done so, but for madame, whose

spirit had been stirred within her to watch him and Aveline. The oft-repeated 'ma petite,' and the rejoinders of 'cher monsieur,' became to her so many big stones which interfered with her happiness, and she gradually lost her temper and her appetite.

'Thou hast the *migraine*, ma mie,' said monsieur. 'This news has been too much for thy philosophy. It overcame mine at first, but we shall recover it when we arrive, shortly, at our Belle Vue.'

'There is so much to think of, Alphonse. First, how we can best convey Frou-Frou and Loulou, and the parrot; then, what is to be done with Lilywhite, finally Aveline.'

'Those things arrange themselves, my friend. What you call "ready money," which, like a bad valet, is never ready when wanted, is our only present difficulty.'

'I have received a letter from Mrs. Moore which will make us easy concerning Aveline. It is truly kind and considerate, and will be a delightful home.'

The chevalier, as we must now call him, opened his eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and uttered the interrogative exclamation 'Hein?' adding,

'I know not what Madame Moore can have to say concerning la petite. But everybody interest herself in the child. Perhaps, however, she like not the attentions of her eldest son. He would be a bon parti, but we cannot yet afford to part with her.'

'It has nothing to do with the captain, mon Alphonse. Indeed, Mrs. Moore is too much wrapped up in her own ailments to see what goes on. But it is really very kind and considerate.'

Here madame made a variety of little

hems and movements that attracted the attention of her spouse.

'But what is it, my friend? There is something beneath the rose. What does she say?' he asked.

'Here is the letter,' she replied, handing him one. 'She has omitted to address me as Madame la Chevalière, but, as Quiz says, that is American ignorance. She is an amiable woman, and I think Aveline would be happy with her.'

He took out his spectacles and read Mrs. Moore's note. His colour rose, and, with a French prefatorial word which, happily, his wife did not understand, he looked her in the face, and said, vehemently,

'And who has dared to say that we discard the child? We adopt an orphan when we are poor, and forsake her when we are rich! Mon Dieu! that is not our manners. We use her to clean, and sew,

and write, and amuse us when we have no servant but Lilyvite; and so soon as we may maintain our proper domestics we send her as *femme de chambre* to another! Non, madame; not so long as Alphonse d'Angère has a heart to beat in his breast. Non, la petite! not so long as thou needest a friend and protector who loves thee as a father. Say, madame ma femme, that this comes not from thee! Say it proceeds from thy relations, who, now that we prosper, regard us as angels, and laugh no longer at our little weaknesses. I have understood them. But they succeed not in chasing from us the orphan child of our adoption.'

He rose in his excitement, and paced the room. His wife had never before seen him so moved. The mouse had become a lion. He had never in his life before called her madame ma femme. She was

frightened to death, awed, petrified. She actually trembled before this meek, unsusceptible Alphonse, who had been her humble servant for a quarter of a century. Was he going to be a tyrant? If so, what would become of her in a foreign country? She began to sob, but he took no notice.

'Tell her she may have Lilyvite, but not Aveline,' he resumed. 'Tell them all that the child loves us. Ha! Amicia, crush not the pretty flower, love; she blooms not in the harsh air; cease to nourish her and she fades away. So would it be with Aveline. Think, mon amie, how it was when her mother died. But for thy maternal tenderness, she would have followed her to the tomb.'

'Oh, Alphonse, mon Alphonse! Be not so unkind. Forgive me,' sobbed the subdued wife.

'Forgive thee, my friend! What words!

But thou wilt cherish the little one, and aid her to forget her friendless state?'

'I will, I will!'

'Then write to Mrs. Moore and say Mademoiselle Roone accompanies us to our patrimony. That will suffice. Now permit that I embrace thee, ma mie.'

He imprinted a kiss on each of her cheeks, and sought to calm his choler by stooping over the dogs. They had been in distress during this scene, vainly endeavouring to attract the attention of their mistress by pulling at her gown and yelling. The parrot also had not been an indifferent spectator, but had imitated her sobs to perfection, and had even aided her by ejaculating, 'Kiss, kiss, Alphonse.' But they had been unheeded. Now that the assertion of marital authority had been made, and Monsieur le Chevalier d'Angère was master of the occasion, he conquered

himself and consoled his wife by his usual laugh and a 'Tais toi, Jacquot.'

Thus Aveline's fate was sealed, and Leonard's advice was proved to be good. But neither of them knew that a 'first quarrel' had taken place, and that certain words rankled in the breast of Madame la Chevalière.

Leonard afterwards discovered, through his uncle, that Aveline was to accompany her protectors abroad. Mrs. Moore had said that she feared she had been premature in asking for her transfer, since the answer she received was sharp and decided; but she meant to try Lilywhite as housemaid, because Madame d'Angère recommended her.

The chevalier gave Aveline to understand indirectly that neither he, his wife, the dogs, nor the parrot could live without her, and she accepted her new prospects

with girlish delight. To see the real Fontainebleau had been one of her many dreams, and now it would be a reality. 'How happy we shall be, dear madame!' was her frequent cry; but she fancied the response she received was cold.

However, there was not much time to muse over petty jealousies or misunderstandings, for the move from England to France was to be made as soon as Fontainebleau Villa was sub-let and its furniture sold. This was done without much difficulty, and during the sale the chevalier, his wife, and Aveline were invited to stay at Major Dallimore's. Aveline's invitation had neither been given nor accepted *con amore;* but there was no choice. To the chagrin of the ladies, she was to remain with the d'Angères, and they were obliged to make the best of it.

'Blood is thicker than water,' remarked

Mrs. Dallimore. 'Sister Amicia will not leave her property away from her own relations.'

'But what of the chevalier?' asked malicious Quiz.

During the week spent professedly at Major Dallimore's, Aveline found so much to do at the cottage that she was not often at his house. Madame d'Angère, however, was there entirely, and her relations were not long in discovering that Aveline owed her projected transportation to her new home more to the chevalier than to his wife. Unintentionally perhaps, but surely, they pretty well effaced the kind feelings generated in her breast by that first quarrel, and imprinted suspicion in their place. Hers was, so to speak, an innocent jealousy, which imagined only that her Alphonse lavished on Aveline more of the affection that belonged of right to her,

than was meet; and she was too selfish to relinquish any share of it, too narrow-minded to understand his large-hearted benevolence.

Meanwhile, unsuspicious Aveline polished up the old furniture, so that it might look its best at the sale, packed boxes, distributed presents in madame's name, aided the chevalier in the arrangement of his precious manuscripts and books, and, by her cheerfulness, sustained his flagging spirits. Strange as it seems, he grew melancholy at the prospect of leaving the country of his adoption and returning to his native land, saying to Aveline, that here he had some few friends; there, all who belonged to him were dead. Leonard, also, helped to cheer him, coming when he could to the cottage, and lending a hand in many ways; but there was a sad counter-influence in Lisle. He escaped continu-

ally, from tutors and governors, to Aveline, hindering her and distressing the chevalier. His grief was genuine, and he masterfully declared that they should not go.

In spite of the young lord of the manor, however, Fontainebleau Villa was dismantled, and all prepared for the sale.

On the afternoon previous to that event, Aveline and Lilywhite chanced to be alone in the house. The former went from room to room, bidding farewell to the many familiar objects, and seeing that all was ready. She stood awhile in the window of the little drawing-room, a tear in her eye, and a pang at her heart, as she looked out on the plaisance she loved. She had her walking things on, prepared to leave for good.

'How sad it is!' she thought. 'How melancholy are the echoes of one's feet on

these uncarpeted boards, how bare the pictureless walls, and how silent the rooms without the dogs and parrot. I think I have said good-bye to everyone but Lily-white. I should like to part friends with her, though I know she does not love me. I wish to leave, bearing no one ill-will, though I sometimes long to return Quiz's hard speeches. I could, if I dared, but I know it would be wrong. Of course I have no right to expect that Mrs. Dallimore or Mrs. Churchhouse should look on me otherwise than as a sort of servant, and I try to keep down my pride when they and others treat me *de haut en bas,* as dear monsieur says. I have heard them call my dear mamma a pauper, and me a charity girl, and I have longed—but, I will be a Christian, as Mr. Leonard says, and forgive and forget. Lilywhite first! What can I say to her? How shall I begin?' A

half smile flitted over the fair young face, as she moved slowly from the window and went downstairs with reluctant steps. 'I have tried so often to take out her claws; I will try again,' was her thought, as she entered the kitchen.

'I hope you will like your new situation at the manor, Lilywhite,' she began, cautiously. 'I think Mrs. Moore is a very kind lady, and it is a beautiful place.'

'I shall know what I have to do, anyhow, Aveline, which is more than you will,' was the snappish rejoinder. 'For I shall be upper-housemaid, and you are only maid-of-all-work, and don't know from minute to minute what you'll be called to do next. Mrs. Moore can't be such a fidget as madame, or want such a lot o' waiting.'

'Oh! but madame is so sweet and kind. I like to wait on her. Perhaps

we shall never meet again, Lilywhite.'

'Praps not, Aveline, and that may be all for the best. As we both come from the same school, I don't see why you should a-lived in the parlour and I in the kitchen.'

'But you said just now, Lilywhite, that you liked to know your work, and to have it to yourself. I really think you have had most leisure, and your kitchen is just like a parlour, as you keep it.'

Lilywhite was slightly mollified.

'Anyhow, 'tis better to stop in England than to go to foreign parts, Aveline. We knows what we eats at home, but abroad they gives you frogs and snails and all sorts o' creeping things. I don't envy you, I'm sure.'

'You need not, Lilywhite, for you are better off than I. You have still a mother. But I want you to think of me sometimes

when I am far away, and so I have embroidered you a housewife, which I hope you will accept.'

Aveline produced a sample of work, worthy of the school of art to which Isabella would have apprenticed her.

'Well, that is beautiful!' exclaimed Lilywhite, involuntarily. 'Flowers all over the back, and cottons and pins and needles enough to last one's life. I'm sure I don't know where you found the money or the time, Aveline.'

'I saved up my money, and I sat up in my room at night to make it. I am so glad you like it, Lilywhite.'

A flush of such intense pleasure, and a smile of such innocent satisfaction, adorned the lovely face, that Lilywhite could not resist them. She thanked Aveline naturally, and regretted that she had nothing to give her in return.

'Give me your good wishes and try to think kindly of me,' said Aveline bursting into tears and throwing her arms round the astonished and softened domestic. 'Good-bye, good-bye, dear Lilywhite.'

'I'm sure I'm very sorry if ever I was unkind,' said Lilywhite, and thus the claws were drawn for the present.

Aveline rushed out of the house. At the gate she met Leonard. Seeing her tears, he asked her to walk to the castle before venturing into the town. He said he was going to dine with the Dallimores, and had been sent to look after her by the chevalier. They walked up the hill in silence, until they reached the ruin. Then Leonard brought renewed smiles to her face by telling her that he was going up to town the same day as herself and her friends.

'It will be jolly to travel all together.

I only hope Polly will behave herself,' he said, laughing.

He forgot his uncle's good advice and remained the best part of an hour with Aveline, wandering round and round the castle, indifferent to the gossips whom they chanced to meet. They loved one another dearly, as brother and sister, and had a firm, leal faith in the interest which each felt for each. Leonard, who saw the under-current that ran beneath the apparently smooth surface of the girl's present prospects, felt that this semi-adoption was insecure.

'You will now be prepared for the changes and chances of life as I hope to be,' he said. 'I feel that we have no actual claim on our friends, and must be ready to struggle alone. This is easier for me than you; but you have much courage, and will use it well whatever betide.'

'I am not afraid so long as dear monsieur is my friend, and—and you, Mr. Leonard,' she replied, with a slight hesitation. 'But madame changes with circumstances. Still I think we shall return to the old ways when in France. If I knew my actual position better it would not be difficult, but to be one day daughter, the next—' she paused.

'Maid-of-all-work,' supplied Leonard, with a laugh. 'But at Fontainebleau there will be no Lilywhite—no nieces—no sisters—and la petite will be all in all.'

'You really think so!' cried Aveline, turning her clear eyes upon him. 'Then I shall be happy, and no sort of work will come amiss to me. Don't you know, Mr. Leonard, how easy it is to labour for those who really love us? But a cold look seems to freeze one up, and to stop one's power of doing even one's duty.'

'That is a psychological problem, Aveline; the touch of soul on soul for good or evil. Words are comprehensible when not, as Rochefoucauld said, used to conceal one's ideas; but looks—they are simply mesmeric, and often uncontrollable. I am myself too apt to be influenced by them; still they are but the momentary expression of a passing thought, and not, like words, planted for ever in the atmosphere. It is awful to think that our hasty speech travels through the ages.'

'Ah! now we are getting too philosophical,' said Aveline, with a glance half serious, half mirthful, which, if Leonard believed in his own theory, must have been mesmeric, it was so eloquent. 'Monsieur sometimes goes deep, deep into things that I cannot understand, and I puzzle my brain over them until I seem to have none left. But I think we must make

haste,' she added. 'It will be nearly dinner-time before we reach Major Dallimore's, and—and—what will madame say?'

She looked terrified as the fear of being late suddenly aroused her from her temporary happiness with Leonard, but he heartened her up, and, when they finally reached Major Dallimore's in time for dinner, she was literally radiant in youth and beauty.

Lisle was watching for her.

'Aveline, you've been painting your face!' he cried. 'You've promised to go for the very last walk with me, and now you've been with that Leonard Leigh.'

'We have to-morrow, Lisle. We will take our long, last walk to-morrow,' she replied, as the boy put his arm round her waist and looked affectionately into her face.

And, despite his wayward, untrammelled nature, she returned his child-love faithfully, for, as she had implied to Leonard, she could toil for those who loved her, while her frank, trustful heart shrank from the chill look or tone of those who cared not for her.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RIVALS.

QUIZ had been watching for Leonard, much as Lisle had been for Aveline, and when they appeared together she was very wroth. While Aveline went to take off her things, she managed to waylay Leonard, and they went together into the breakfast-room, now a sumptuously-furnished apartment. He perceived from her manner that something was amiss. He knew her moods of old, and found that they had not greatly changed with years ;

but he did not know that he was answerable for many of them.

'I wanted to ask you, Leonard, why you gave Aveline the pocket-book I presented to you before you went to London,' she began. 'It was a Christmas present.'

'Did I?' he asked. 'I am not aware of it. I remember she was very unhappy, and, not having a sou to buy her anything, I presented her with the first thing that turned up. If it consoled her, I am sure you were glad, though I must have forgotten that the gift was yours. I was in such confusion myself that I was scarcely responsible.'

'I saw it in her hand soon after she went as servant to Aunt Amicia, and accused her of stealing it. She said you had given it to her. We quarrelled over it, but she finally returned it to me. There it is. Do what you will with it.'

Quiz threw the small, misused pocket-book disdainfully to Leonard. He picked it up.

'I shall keep it, Quiz, and feel flattered that two lovely young ladies thought it worth their while to dispute over such a trifle.'

'Young ladies!' echoed Quiz. 'May I ask whether you and Aveline have completed your arrangements?'

'What arrangements? It is settled that I go up to town with them. I know of no other mutual plan.'

'You are not—not engaged?'

'Engaged! What can you mean, Quiz?'

'That your various private meetings and *tête-à-tête* walks, the scene at the manor, your visits to the villa, and, finally, this farewell ramble and your departure on the same day must lead one

to suppose that you understand one another.'

'I trust we do, but not in the way you imagine. I am sorry you think me so unprincipled. I may, at this moment, be making forty or fifty pounds a year. I live, by courtesy, in one of two chambers belonging to your uncle, Mr. Conquest. I do my utmost not to burden my uncle, who is not too well off. I have my own way to make in the world. And your opinion of me is so low, that you think I could drag a child—for Aveline is little more—into positive poverty because I am interested in her. Remember that I, as a man, can face the imputation of flirting, or even being engaged; but that a friendless, half-protected, beautiful girl cannot with impunity. It might soil her pure character and blight her prospects. I am sure you, Quiz, would not do this.'

'I might not, but others would. We all judge by appearances, and people will talk.'

Quiz began to feel uncomfortable beneath the penetrating glance of Leonard's very searching eyes.

'Then you may tell them, if you will, Quiz, that, if I know myself, I never mean to engage myself to any girl until I can maintain both her and myself respectably. But this is, evidenly, not enough. You may add that I will do my utmost not to pay particular attention to any girl, my cousins excepted, who are engaged to be married; and that under no circumstances will I give or accept presents, pocket-books particularly, or write letters until such time as I am engaged. Do you think that will satisfy the public mind? I must confess that I am flattered that it should take so much interest in a poor lawyer's

clerk, with "no present income and no future prospects," as the appeals say.'

'How absurd you are, Leonard! Why, everyone is talking about you.'

'How very kind everyone is. I hope some day they may have something worth talking about. Meanwhile I perceive I must be more discreet. You shall see how equally I will divide my attentions this very day between the three Miss Dallimores and the proscribed Aveline.'

Quiz was sharp enough, but she did not understand Leonard's manner. She had overshot her mark, and was not aware of it. She neither comprehended his feelings nor her own, and little suspected that his apparently half sarcastic speech was in earnest. When she was a child, he had been her hero; now she was a woman she scarcely dared think what he was, only she knew she was unjustly jealous of Aveline,

and would have him devote himself to her alone. But to her chagrin he kept his word. At the large family dinner that soon ensued, he so managed as to be seated between Helen and his cousin Sophy, and neither by word nor look distinguished either Quiz or Aveline.

Mr. and Mrs. Churchhouse and their daughters had been invited to this farewell feast, and Mrs. Dallimore, in counting up her round dozen, had somehow omitted Aveline, who made the thirteenth. Surveying the covers and d'oyleys through her spectacles, she realized that unlucky number, and, rather than subject herself or her friends to the chance of demise during the ensuing year, she yielded to the entreaties of Lisle to 'dine with Aveline.' She, therefore, had her cavaliere servente, who engrossed all her attention,

and was happily unconscious of Leonard's indifferentism.

The dinner was lively and pleasant, he joining in the general conversation, if not actually leading it.

'In the sulks, Quiz? Hadn't room for an officer,' whispered Major Dallimore to his daughter, who was unusually silent.

'You shall be one of our first visitors, Quiz,' said the chevalier, but elicited no response.

The girl was hurt and angry, and knew that she had herself been the cause of Leonard's changed manner. Still she had no right to complain, for she caught his eyes fixed on her face more than once, and thought how very handsome he was. Good looks are often a misfortune to a woman, but should not interfere with masculine success in life. Still Leonard's bid

fair to bring him into difficulties with the weaker and admiring sex.

There was music in the evening, and Quiz was prevailed upon to sing with some difficulty. Leonard turned over the leaves and praised her performance, which softened her ill-humour; but he did the same for Helen, who sang villainously. When, however, the chevalier asked Aveline to sing a French song, which she did very sweetly, he seated himself at a distance, and made no remark. None but Quiz understood this by-play, and Leonard was secretly amused at her annoyance.

'Have you offended Quiz, Leonard?' whispered his cousin Lucy.

'Girls are such fools!' said Isabella, who overheard. 'If they all had a trade or profession to engage their thoughts, they would not have time to waste on trivialities.'

'What are trivialities, Isabella?' asked Leonard.

'Lovers!' replied Isabella, so loud that everybody heard.

'I should lose a good slice of my income, if they were done away with,' laughed Mr. Churchhouse. 'But then, to be sure, I should keep my daughters.'

The young folks smiled and blushed, but De Fortibus was not disconcerted.

'Better have taught them to keep themselves, uncle,' she said.

Aveline, meanwhile, had been sitting apart with her friend Helen, Lisle having gone to bed. She was, happily, unconscious of Leonard's grave manner, not expecting particular notice from him or anyone else. She knew her position, and maintained it without either fear, servility, or presumption. But he had been aroused to a sense of his by the incautious words

spoken by jealous Quiz. He had left his former friends and playmates children; he had found them women. He thought to take up the rôle just where he had ceased to play, but intervening links prevented, so he must begin a new part. With his usual decision, he settled that at once. He would abstain henceforth from private walks or talks with young ladies, and would stick to law and literature, and not to love—three L's quite as important as the time-honoured and well-worn three R's.

So, when the evening came to a close, he shook hands with the four girls as rapidly as possible. Quiz laughed in spite of herself.

'I am going to spend two or three days at the vicarage,' she said; 'so we shall meet again.'

'All right. Then we need not say

that awful word, good-bye,' he returned. 'Neither need we, Aveline,' he added, as he fancied her hand trembled in his.

'Not if we all travel together,' she replied, her sweet face flushing.

'*Au revoir*, my friend Léonard,' said the chevalier, and the vicarage party proceeded to their fly.

The following day was the sale. Major Dallimore, Mr. Churchhouse and Leonard supported the chevalier, and helped to bid. Mrs. Dallimore remained with Madame d'Angère, Quiz went to the vicarage, and Aveline and Lisle departed, soon after breakfast, for their promised autumn ramble. Mrs. Dallimore furnished them with cake and sandwiches, lest the precious Lisle should be hungry, and imposed endless restrictions, which she knew he would not care to remember. They wandered far into the woods among the ferns and

mosses, gathering nuts and blackberries as they went, and treading down the reddening leaves. They passed through lanes with hedges laden with traveller's joy and brightened by scarlet berries; they crossed the green meadow and the yellow stubble-field, and seemed never aweary, for Aveline loved the country, and Lisle loved to be with her.

They had their luncheon in the middle of the wood, seated on a mossy carpet, and surrounded by greenery. The autumn sun and blue sky peeped in upon them through the trees, and the now nearly songless birds twittered for their amusement.

'I don't think Fontainebleau Forest is as pretty as this,' said Lisle. 'You will be sure to come back, Aveline?'

'I should think so; but, you know, everything is very uncertain, Lisle. Two

or three months ago I had no idea of going to France.'

'I hate France. The Isle of Wight is the best country in the world. Will you write to me every day, Aveline? Then I will try to be good against you come back to marry me. Now you must promise not to marry anyone else.' He sprang up and clasped her neck. 'I will choke you if you don't promise,' he continued.

He seemed likely to accomplish his threat, but Aveline freed herself.

'You said you would behave well if I took this walk with you, but you have broken your word,' she said, severely.

'But I am so very, very fond of you, Aveline. I like you better than all the world. If I am ever so ill again as I was when I had measles, will you come and nurse me and read to me, and tell me pretty stories as you did then?'

'I will try, Lisle; but I hope you will keep very well and very good for your mamma's sake.'

'I like to be naughty with her, you know, because she gives me sweets to be good. She says a lord of the manor must be a gentleman, and not cry. Shall I have all I want when I am that?'

'No—you will have to live for other people, like the good fairy I told you of. You will be the good fairy then.'

'I think you would be the prettiest fairy, Aveline.'

Here the boy leaned his elbows on Aveline's lap and gazed into her face. He was strangely subdued for the moment. She passed her hands over his head and kissed his forehead.

'I think we may both be good fairies if we pray to our dear Lord in Heaven to make us so. Shall we try?'

'I will, Aveline, if you will soon come back.'

Tears sprang into the girl's eyes. The spontaneous love of this child was very sweet to her, and she knew it to be genuine. There seemed to be some sort of alloy that she failed to extract in the gold of all other love, but this was pure. Seeing her tears, Lisle threw his arms about her and began to cry also.

'This will never do, darling,' she said, cheerfully. 'We must not cry or everyone will be displeased.'

So they finished their luncheon, had a dessert of blackberries and nuts, and continued their ramble through the woods and lanes.

The sale at Fontainebleau Cottage was very successful and relieved the chevalier of all difficulty concerning 'ready money.' He had enough and to spare, for all the

neighbourhood, indeed half the island flocked to Carisbrooke to see the tiny home of one who was suddenly transformed into a refugee of noble birth and aristocratic appearance. His marriage with a Lisle of Lisle had been a scandal a quarter of a century ago, when he was branded as money-hunter, swindler almost, though he had been for some years a highly respectable teacher of French; but his transformation into a chevalier with a château was equally exaggerated, and, beyond the precincts of his village, he was fabled to be a prince, at least, of the ancient régime of France, with an actual castle in perspective.

He laughed, took snuff, and explained, till he declared aside to Leonard that he thought of carrying the vacant throne of France by a coup-de-main as soon as the sale was over.

Leonard, the major, and Mr. Churchhouse were his staunch auxiliaries, and helped to make the sale go off well; the ladies of the family were not present, and, while Aveline and Lisle were roaming the woods, they were variously occupied with Madame d'Angère. Aveline had previously done most of the packing, so madame, accompanied by one and another of her female relatives, made her adieux to friends far and near, during the two days that the sale lasted.

Quiz had chosen to remain at Lisle Vicarage, somewhat to her aunt Amicia's chagrin; but declared her intention of returning home before she left, and seeing her off. She was in a wayward mood which her friends did not understand. Leonard alone guessed at its cause. But he maintained his resolution, and gave her no opportunity of showing pique or dis-

pleasure privately. He was not much at the vicarage, owing to the sale, and they scarcely met.

The evening before his departure for town he spent at home. All the family were assembled, and, as is usual at such times, various matters had to be discussed, and his future plans amongst them. In reply to a question from his aunt concerning them, he replied,

'I have no plans, aunt. I hope to plod on till I get a rise, and this holiday has "renewed my youth," as people say who are getting up in years.'

Quiz fixed her resentful eyes upon him, and said, scornfully,

'You scarcely intend to sit at the Conquest desk for ever. There must be something better than that.'

'Many things, Quiz; but they do not fall to my lot. Have you settled your plans?'

'Yes. I shall return home to-morrow morning when you go to the station. This will save uncle the trouble of sending me.'

'Thank you, Quiz,' said Mr. Churchhouse. 'I am going, too, to have a last look at our preux-chevalier, and the rest. I was out, you know, when he and Amicia came yesterday. Besides, I want to say good-bye to Aveline.'

Circumvented again! Quiz had resolved to secure a *tête-à-tête* with Leonard somehow, and this was her final move. Their eyes met, and they could not fail to understand one another. He was as resolute as she, and she felt that her malice was the cause. A flush rose to her beautiful face, and she averted her eyes, and turned her haughty head from him.

'Have you and Leonard had a quarrel?' asked Lucy, who was always innocently

engaged in making imaginary matches.

'About what *could* we quarrel?' she returned, and again glanced at Leonard.

He was addressing his uncle, resolved to ignore the capricious mood, and the subject changed to graver and more earnest matters.

The following morning breakfast was quickly dispatched. All took it for granted that Quiz left the table to prepare for her drive. The carriage was at the door, Leonard's portmanteau mounted, and he had taken an affectionate leave of his aunt and cousins.

'Quiz, Quiz, are you coming?' echoed through the house, when she did not appear.

Her uncle was getting impatient. She came at last with stately pace into the hall, but without hat or mantle.

'My things are not ready. You will

lose the train. You must go without me,' she said, advancing to the porch about which the family party were assembled.

'Then good-bye, Quiz,' said Leonard, hurrying towards her with outstretched hand.

She stood, framed in an arch of flowers and greenery, tall, majestic, proud. The graceful head was thrown back, the eyes looking afar. She laid her hand carelessly in Leonard's, but he grasped it warmly. A flush rose to her face, and she looked at him.

'Good-bye, Leonard,' she said, half coldly, half sadly. 'Tell aunt and the chevalier that I send them a thousand excuses and a thousand remembrances. I shall come soon to Fontainebleau.'

The pair remained a moment with clasped hands. Mr. Churchhouse summoned Leonard, and the hands parted.

'Give my love to Aveline,' she said, half regretfully, half defiantly, and he understood that the words were intended for a peace offering.

'Thank you, I will. Good-bye,' he returned, as he took the reins, and placed himself beside his uncle.

'We shall expect you again at Christmas,' cried his aunt, and, 'Be sure you come,' echoed his cousins.

While this was passing at Lisle Vicarage, there was some commotion at the new railway station at Newport. A party of friends had assembled on the platform to bid adieu to the chevalier and his family. It was quite an exciting scene. The chevalier was in full fuss, superintending the luggage and Polly, shaking hands, and receiving congratulations. Madame was elegantly attired, with Loulou in her arms, Aveline, in simple travelling dress, with

Frou-Frou; while Major Dallimore was more important than anyone, being a director of the new railroad.

Aveline was suddenly accosted by Captain Moore.

'I failed to see you when I called. I am hoping to go abroad soon, and then perhaps we may meet again,' he said.

She was surprised, and could only say, 'Thank you,' and 'Good-bye,' as the words 'Take your seats,' were heard. Then she had more than she could do to manage the two dogs, for madame had her handkerchief to her eyes and Loulou's equilibrium was endangered; and, besides, Lisle was importunate for 'the last word and the last kiss.' Aveline's eyes were full of tears as she bade farewell to many friends, but she knew, intuitively, that those in whose hearts she would live the longest were Lisle and Captain Moore.

'Where is Leonard?' was now the general cry.

'Wait a minute for Mr. Leigh,' said the major to the guard.

'Time is up, sir,' returned that official, as the engine snorted to be off.

But our island is not London, and even trains can wait. Aveline, in dismay, looked across the station, through the gates, down the hill, and saw the vicarage carriage speeding up, Leonard, as charioteer, urging the horse. He had barely time to take his ticket and jump into the carriage, when the train actually started. He could only wave his adieux to his friends.

'It was Quiz's fault,' he explained, when he got breath. 'She would and she wouldn't. Yesterday she settled to drive in with us and see us off. This morning we waited and waited, but she had changed her mind. I hope all ladies are not so un-

certain. She sent her love to you all, and particularly to you, Aveline.'

'How kind of her!' said Aveline, smiling through the tears.

CHAPTER VII.

'THE CHILD OF OUR ADOPTION.'

WHEN the train was fairly off, the chevalier took out his snuff-box, madame dried her eyes, and Leonard and Aveline had enough to do in preventing the dogs from jumping out of the window. They consoled themselves and one another by degrees and had a pleasant journey. Counter-influences were left behind, and they grew cheerful on the prospect before them. The railway to Ryde was new to Aveline, and every fresh object in her sweet island drew forth exclamations

of pleasure; for she loved the home of her adoption.

Happily, nothing recalled her last journey with her poor mother, for then they had crossed from Southampton to Cowes; now they were to cross from Ryde to Portsmouth. Her spirits rose as they travelled on, and her bright questions and answers delighted her male companions. The female was more abstracted. It turned out, when they were on the boat, that she had been striving to recall the words of a song she had sung in her youth, and the effort had been almost too much for her. However, when she and Aveline were on deck, on a bench facing the island, a dog on each lap, the handkerchief was again raised to the eyes, and she murmured,

'Isle of beauty, fare thee well.'

'Hein, ma mie, we see it not for the last time,' said the chevalier, seating

himself beside her and taking her hand.

Then she repeated the song, Aveline assisting, and so they bade adieu to the island, and she recovered her spirits. Leonard watched them, both touched and amused.

A word to the guard at Portsmouth secured them a carriage to themselves, so that the dogs and Polly had it all their own way. And a very riotous way it proved, for no sooner was the envious baize removed from Polly's cage, than she indemnified herself for the silence of imaginary night, by raising such a cry, and talking so much, that people poked their heads out of neighbouring compartments, to see what was the matter.

And Aveline chattered almost as fast as Polly. It was as if an incubus had been removed from her tongue. No Lilywhite, no Dallimores, no Mrs. Churchhouse, no

gossipy neighbours to remark on her conduct! She was quite unrestrained, and Leonard scarcely recognized the girl he had seen a few days before. She had made peace with Lilywhite, Quiz had sent her a kind message, the severe Isabella had given her a parting remembrance, and the elders had wished her good-bye with tolerable kindness; she had bade an affectionate farewell to the Blue School and its mistress, and a new world lay before her. The butterfly, happiness, loves to flit round 'sweet seventeen,' but she rarely remains long on any particular flower, so Aveline's high spirits fell before the day was done. She knew they would, therefore was prepared.

A grand carriage awaited them at Victoria. It was Mr. Conquest's, Q.C. He had persuaded his wife that it was only proper to invite her own sister for a few

days, and she, in consideration of her brother-in-law's restored rank and fortune, had consented. Leonard superintended the luggage, some of which was left at the office, to be picked up when they started for France; but what was to be done with Polly and the remainder? The coachman evidently looked askance at the cage and cumbersome boxes.

'If you will trust Polly to me, I will follow in a cab,' said Leonard. 'I shall get back to the Temple somehow.'

The chevalier proposed that he should join Leonard, but his wife negatived this; she suggested that Aveline should be with Polly; but Leonard put a decided veto upon that for two reasons. The first was that he wished proper respect to be paid to Aveline; the second, his resolution concerning all young ladies. He already began to find that he would have consider-

able difficulty in keeping this. However, he gained the day, as he generally did, and humbly followed the grand carriage, its coachman, footman, and invited guests in a four-wheeler, accompanied by the parrot. He was much amused at the position, and wondered if Mrs. Conquest would ask him to dinner.

While this procession was bowling through London, and toiling up the hill to Hampstead, Mrs. Conquest was in a state of much excitement. She had not seen her expected relatives since she had grown so fat, and her increased and increasing size was the trouble and occupation of her life. Her husband had faithfully promised to be at home to receive them, and he had not arrived. She was considerably put out at having been cajoled into inviting them, and then left to welcome them alone. However, he appeared first,

bag in hand, and very much flurried.

Having received the customary salute, and stowed away his bag, his better half began for the twentieth time the recapitulation of her grievances.

'You would scarcely believe, darling, that the expectation of seeing Amicia and her husband after so many years has brought on severe palpitation. I almost wish we had not asked them.'

'I wonder they accepted,' returned Mr. Conquest. 'You were so long making up your mind that they had barely time to signify their intention of coming, "for two days only," before they started. Hurry always disturbs the heart, so you have no one to blame but yourself.'

'Certainly Amicia's reply was short and sweet,' said Mrs. Conquest. 'She merely said, "We shall be happy to avail ourselves of your kind invitation," just as

if she had been answering a stranger.'

'You have only had to prepare a room and order dinner for five,' laughed the husband. 'I thought it would be a good opportunity of being civil to Moore. Here they are.'

He hurried into the hall, followed by his wife with her hand on her heart, and was at the door in a trice.

'So glad to see you, Amicia!' he exclaimed, as the footman held open the carriage door, and he helped out madame.

The chevalier and Aveline remained behind a few moments, picking up dogs and parcels. The footman took possession of the latter, and they followed with the former.

'I declare you are scarcely at all altered, Amicia,' cried Mrs. Conquest, after a sisterly embrace.

'Sophia! It cannot be you!' cried

Madame d'Angère, surveying the lady before her with undisguised surprise.

'Here is monsieur—the Chevalier d'Angère, I mean,' broke in Mr. Conquest, to cover his wife's chagrin.

'Madame Conquest, how well you look. You are more handsome than ever. You remember when I did teach you the verb aimer,' said the polite chevalier.

'And this young lady is——' asked Mr. Conquest, seeing Aveline standing near the door with Frou-Frou struggling to be free.

'Mees Roone. The child of our adoption,' was the reply, unheard by Mrs. Conquest.

'We expected your maid. But two dogs, Amicia! What shall we do with them? I hate dogs. We have not an animal in the house,' said Mrs. Conquest, perceiving Aveline.

'We will keep them from your sight,

Mistress Conquest,' laughed the chevalier. 'But we are inseparables, my dear woife, Aveline, Frou-Frou, Loulou, Jacquot, et votre très humble serviteur.'

Mrs. Conquest looked from the chevalier to the dogs, then to Aveline, who stood uncertain whether to advance or retreat. Frou-Frou had escaped from her arms, and had joined Loulou in a voyage of discovery round the footman's legs, as he went to and fro with wraps and parcels. They were barking their sharpest and loudest, and the chevalier called to them in vain to be silent, while Aveline was so confused by her own reception, or, rather, non-reception, that she was unconscious of their free and easy manners.

'Surely you have not brought a niece, after all?' whispered Mrs. Conquest to her sister Amicia, who was still surveying her in unmitigated astonishment.

'Did I not tell you, Sophia? Surely I must have mentioned that we should be accompanied by Aveline.'

'Who is Aveline? We have not a niece so called. You certainly did not name her when you replied to our invitation. Neither did you mention the dogs.'

'She is a young orphan who lives with us. And I assure you the dogs are the most accomplished creatures in the world. You will remember Frou-Frou, that we purchased when we were last in town. He shall display his talents after dinner.'

'Another orphan! Wasn't that young Leigh enough?'

Mrs. Conquest, a good-natured woman at heart, now went to speak to Aveline, still standing near the door. She was evidently struck by her appearance.

'My sister Amicia's memory is not improved,' she said. 'She did not tell us

that we should have the pleasure of your company.'

'How very unfortunate!' said Aveline, starting back. 'I am truly sorry. What shall I do?'

'I daresay we can put you up, if you don't mind a dressing-room. But, with my health, everything flurries me, and brings on palpitation.'

'I wish madame had told me—some arrangement could have been made,' stammered Aveline.

'I took it for granted she would bring a maid, but was not prepared for a young lady,' said Mrs. Conquest, encouragingly.

'Madame has no maid at present,' returned Aveline, hesitating. 'I always help her, and if you will kindly consider me as—as her maid, or anything that will not inconvenience you, I shall be quite content.'

'Are you a lady-help, then? I do not understand.'

'Yes—I think so. Perhaps that is my position,' replied Aveline, smiling, and displaying such dimples and lustrous eyes that Mrs. Conquest smiled also.

'You are very pretty,' she said, involuntarily; 'and had better come and take off your things. Don't yelp at me, you horrid little creatures. I hate dogs, and am awfully afraid of hydrophobia,' she added, as Loulou and Frou-Frou suddenly turned their attention to her.

'I will take care that they do not come near you,' said Aveline, smiling at the evident terror.

At this moment, up drove the cab.

'How tiresome!' exclaimed Mrs. Conquest. 'And we can't quite say "not at home," for they will see us here in the hall.'

'It is only Mr. Leonard, with Polly,' said Aveline, as gravely as she could, for she was amused at the situation.

The chevalier hurried to the door to receive his treasure from Leonard, who jumped out of the cab to speak to Mr. Conquest, who had followed the chevalier to the door.

'I came up from the island with the Chevalier and Madame d'Angère, sir,' said Leonard. 'And I just took charge of the parrot and the luggage. I shall be at the office to-morrow.'

'Parrot!' echoed Mr. Conquest, with a despairing glance round at his wife. 'What next?'

'I believe that is all, sir,' laughed Leonard. 'That is my portmanteau; and you can just drop me at the Metropolitan,' he added to the driver.

'My dear Sophia! Here is Mr. Leigh.'

Mr. Conquest added, aside, as she came towards him, 'You must ask him to dinner.'

She was inhospitable at heart, but did not care to be considered so, therefore she insisted on Leonard's remaining. His portmanteau being the only obstacle, Mr. Conquest said he would take it into town with him on the morrow. So Leonard stayed.

Suddenly the parrot uttered a fearful scream, and Mrs. Conquest was so evidently terrified that the chevalier, who was politeness itself, entreated to be allowed to carry it to his room.

'Jacquot will not incommode us. He live with us always,' he explained.

Mr. Conquest led the way to the chevalier's dressing-room, and beckoned Leonard to follow. His wife also proposed that her sister and Aveline should go

upstairs. She preceded them to a sumptuous bed-room.

'What can we do with the dogs?' she said to Aveline, as those animals bounded in.

'I will remain with them, if you will allow me,' replied Aveline, keeping them from the hostess; for they were already frisking about the room in delighted freedom.

'You sweet, obliging girl!' exclaimed Mrs. Conquest, actually kissing her in her sudden gratitude.

'They are always accustomed to dine with us, Sophia,' interposed madame, who was surveying her person in a cheval-glass.

'They are very tired, dear madame, Loulou especially. I think a late dinner would be bad for them,' suggested Aveline.

'It might. They are no longer young,' assented madame.

And poor Aveline, the dogs, and parrot were eventually banished to a small sitting-room on the second-floor, the housemaid being ordered to wait upon them. She would not have objected to this arrangement, had not Leonard been one of the dinner-party; for she had often been left at home to take care of the pets, while her benefactors were abroad. But to lose this last chance of seeing him was a real trial to her. Besides, it was unnecessary. She had nothing to do but to cover up Polly and place it in the chevalier's dressing-room; to unpack the wicker-work sleeping apartment of the dogs, and watch till they were at rest; and, finally, to put them in madame's room. She was almost inclined to wish them at the bottom of the Solent; but she did not.

However, she was young and hungry,

and she consoled herself with the most elaborate dinner she had ever eaten, Mrs. Conquest having ordered the butler to send her a portion of everything through the housemaid, who patronized her as such Abigails will.

Meanwhile, the chevalier was unhappy without her, and Leonard was much disappointed at her non-appearance. Mr. Moore, who happened to be in London on business, had been invited to meet his neighbours of the country, Mr. Conquest having fallen into that not unusual mistake that people cannot see too much of one another. The fact is, that when country people do visit town they like to see new faces.

'I wonder Sophia invited Mr. Moore. We have enough of him in the island,' said madame, afterwards.

'He is of his clientèle,' said monsieur, laughing.

But Mr. Moore had taken this opportunity of meeting Leonard during his stay in town, in order to hear what more he had to tell concerning his sister. He also inquired of the chevalier what had become of that charming little girl to whom his wife had taken such a fancy.

'And my son, too, for that matter,' he added. 'I don't know which was most disappointed when the letter arrived from Madame d'Angère informing us that she was to remain with you. Yet I do not see her.'

'La petite, she take care of the dawgs,' said the chevalier.

Mrs. Conquest felt a twinge of conscience, and when she and her sister withdrew after dinner she went in search of Aveline, while madame declared her intention of taking her customary siesta. Mrs. Conquest found her young guest straining her eyes

through the window, in the hope of seeing something of the heath, but she made out little save the glimmering lamps that dotted its surrounding roads.

'Where are they?' asked Mrs. Conquest, holding back her skirts, and treading as if the room was full of beetles.

'They are asleep. They will not disturb you again till the morning.'

'Then pray come down-stairs. Oh, you are quite nice with that grey dress and the black lace kerchief. Your hair is perfect. How do you manage to live with my sister, Amicia, and all the rest of 'em? And how did they stumble upon you?'

'They received me out of charity, and I would live or die for them.'

All Aveline's natural enthusiasm was thrown into this reply.

'I remember now that I heard of you

from my sisters, Mrs. Dallimore and Mrs. Churchhouse. I wonder Amicia forgot to mention you. But I suppose she is as giddy and forgetful now she is old, as she was when young. How long have you been with her?'

'Nearly ten years.'

'What! You have actually put up with my sister Amicia ten years! That is incredible. When we were all young together, she was so silly that we could scarcely pass an hour without remonstrance.'

'But she is so kind, and has been so good to me,' cried Aveline. 'And as to the chevalier!'

'Yes, there is more material in him. However, I was thankful to marry and be rid of them all, and to escape from the tyranny of Uncle Lisle. I don't know what I should have done in the island with

only country doctors, in my present state of health. Do you know what they are going to do with Leonard Leigh?'

'Is he not to be a lawyer?' asked Aveline, innocently.

'I know not who is to make him one. It seems to me that the world is full of orphans, and that everybody has to adopt somebody else's children. I set my face against that.'

'It is very sad,' sighed Aveline, colouring, and Mrs Conquest, remembering the girl's own orphaned state, led the way downstairs.

They found madame asleep, and Aveline, perceiving that Mrs. Conquest seemed drowsy, began to turn over a photograph book, which enabled that lady to take her accustomed forty winks. So the girl was again left to her reflections. The sight of these two childless ladies somehow re-

called her own mother, and she thought how different her life might have been had her father been as indulgent as their husbands.

When the gentlemen came in, they were all pleased to see so bright an addition to their party, and Mr. Moore especially distinguished her. As he was an elderly man, he could do so with impunity; but Leonard shielded himself under his ægis of prudence, and this hurt her, she scarcely knew how or why.

He had learned a lesson from Quiz, however, that he was not likely to forget, and resolved that no inopportune word or thoughtless attention on his part should again subject her to the remarks of the world.

'We shall meet again at Victoria station,' he said, as he took leave of her and her protectors. 'I shall be there to see you

off, if Mr. Charles Conquest can spare me.'

'And you will pass your next half holiday at Fontainebleau, my friend,' said the chevalier. 'Steam annihilates space in our days. We shall rejoice to see you, is it not, my Amicia? Is it not, ma petite?'

'Certainly,' replied madame, and, if there is sometimes an eloquent response in a blushing cheek, 'Certainly,' said Avcline.

Leonard heard and perceived, but turned away to say good-night to his host and hostess, and finally accompanied Mr. Moore to the region of lawyers.

CHAPTER VIII.

TAKEN INTO CONFIDENCE.

'I HAVE not the least doubt that they were married. It would account for my sister's eccentricities. But I wonder if any good could come of raking up such an old story? They are both dead and buried, and lie side by side. It would be stirring up a stagnant pool that would half suffocate the survivors.'

Thus spoke Mr. Moore to Leonard.

'Right is right, and even the squire's written words expressed that if "I could make wrong right," I was to do so.'

So answered Leonard.

The two men were seated near the old davenport in Leonard's chamber. Its lid was covered with packets of letters tied with red tape, and Leonard held a discoloured letter open in his hand. He had gone through the others and replaced them in their respective bundles—the one he held was the last and most important.

'I have examined every paper carefully,' he continued. 'Then I arranged them, as nearly as possible, according to date. Some being undated, and many, of those alluded to, not amongst them, there are numerous gaps and discrepancies; but certainly proof enough remains to show that the writer and receiver must have been on the most intimate terms. You are quite sure the writing is your sister's?'

'I could take my oath of it. Besides, her name was Marian. If only she had

added the word "wife" to those terms of endearment with which she concludes her letters, all would be plain enough. Or if she had added any surname, whether Cunninghame or Lisle, to the "affectionates" and "devoteds," we should have something to go upon; but "Marian" is sadly defective.'

'So is the correspondence altogether,' said Leonard. 'But, had you known the squire, you would not be surprised. He was the proudest man that ever lived, and had set his face against the marriages, not only of his daughter, but of his nieces, because he did not think them suitable to a Lisle of Lisle. If he married your sister privately, as I believe, she would be careful not to offend his prejudices, or run the risk of discovery. He had also a violent temper.'

'And Marian's was none of the quietest,'

pursued Mr. Moore. 'I can well imagine her miserable state, if she were compelled to be secret. It would be a life-long torture. And secrecy was so unnecessary, that I do not understand it, if they were actually married. She was of respectable birth and good education.'

'But,' suggested Leonard, 'she had unfortunately lived with Mrs. Lisle as maid, and this, to a man of the squire's temperament, would have been sufficient reason for concealment.'

'Still,' said Mr. Moore, 'from what I have picked up in the village, she knew how to hold her own as well as any aboriginal Australian, only, like them, she could not maintain it. Old Biles says, when she was housekeeper, after Mrs. Lisle's death, she was quite mistress. But then she went away, and only returned to die. Where was the squire's wife buried?'

'At Mentone, where she died. Some time elapsed before Miss Cunninghame returned to the manor. It appears that, when she finally left it, the squire was much from home, and spent most of his time at Bath, drinking the waters. He was a martyr to rheumatism. These letters allude to it, and are mostly dated from Bath or Clifton. This last one was written two years before the date of Miss Cunninghame's death at Lisle Manor.'

'I don't understand her interceding so passionately for his daughter, and excusing her marriage,' said Mr. Moore. 'I thought she was dead.'

'So she was,' replied Leonard. 'That is the most puzzling part of it. If the squire had married her, their marriage must have taken place when Miss Lisle was at school, who married afterwards and went to India, where she died, as also did

her husband, the squire not having forgiven them. As he was persistent in his disapprobation of what he considered misalliances, he could scarcely be excused for making one himself. Lieutenant Osborne, who married his daughter, was not only poor, but the son of an army captain who had risen from the ranks. He might have condoned the poverty, but not the lack of family; and having, it is supposed, disinherited his own daughter, he could scarcely, proud as he was, acknowledge to having committed the very fault he punished her for. He is said to have been grievously afflicted when she and her husband were carried off by fever in India, and it is possible that this event was the reason of his residing so little at the manor for many years.'

'If I had a hundred children they should all marry according to their own

choice,' put in Mr. Moore. 'It is they, not I, who have to fight it out. If my eldest son takes it into his head to marry that beautiful girl that Monsieur and Madame d'Angère have got hold of, I shall not interfere; he may do a sight worse.'

'He certainly may,' exclaimed Leonard, letting fall the letter in his astonishment, and fixing his eyes on Mr. Moore.

'Not but that I should prefer Miss Quiz, as they call that uncommonly handsome Miss Dallimore, for then we should be a family party. However, we must get the two others married off first. I like to do a thing quickly, as we do in the colonies. I married late in life myself, to be sure. But then I was making money all my youth, and seeing the world, and one can't do everything. I shouldn't imagine you were amassing a fortune, to look at your abode.'

Leonard laughed. The only change in his habitation consisted in a sort of portière or curtain which his friend Pluckrose had suspended across the room, and which effectually concealed the dormitory portion of it. She had abstracted a chair or two from Mr. Conquest's sumptuous apartment, and so he had now actually a sitting-room. Pluckrose, like the rest of her sex, had taken a great fancy to Leonard, and had improvised this as a surprise when he returned from the country.

'I do not see my way to fortune just now, but I live in hope,' he said.

'You should marry a rich wife. A fine young fellow like you could get anybody. I'll introduce you to a widow with a hundred thousand pounds. The advantage is on her side as regards years, certainly, but then you'll get rid of her all the sooner.'

'Thank you. The sooner the better,' laughed Leonard. 'But we must settle this matter first. If you are willing to spend money, I think your plan is a wise one. We could institute a search privately, through the various registers in the churches of Bath and Bristol, concerning the marriage of Marian Cunninghame, and you could visit the place of this address which I will take down for you.'

Leonard picked up the letter and turning to the davenport transcribed its date and address.

'You are every inch a lawyer,' said Mr. Moore. 'I see that you identify yourself with your friend, Mr. Charles Conquest. Shall you or I manage this business.'

'You, certainly. If it should turn out that your sister married Mrs. Conquest's uncle, it will be you, and not I, who

belong to the family. You would be a connection, I only a clerk.'

'I hope Charles pays you well. He is rich enough,' suggested Mr. Moore. 'But most lawyers butter their own bread, and are not particular as to whether client and clerk eat it dry.'

'Mine is dry enough, but I don't complain,' returned Leonard. 'You must on no account name the squire, these letters, or me to Mr. Charles Conquest. All you want to discover is the marriage certificate of your sister, and he will never identify her as the housekeeper at Lisle Manor, of whom they knew nothing.'

'Their wives would fast enough,' broke in Mr. Moore.

'Mrs. Conquest might; but we don't take the ladies into our confidence. We have not arrived at female counsellors as yet. I wonder whether they will be able

to keep counsel when we do,' said Leonard.

'At any rate, they can't talk longer and less to the purpose than the male counsellors,' replied Mr. Moore. 'If we want counsel's opinion, however, we have only to seek it from Conquest, senior. Charles and he do a thriving trade between them. Are you thinking of being a solicitor, or a barrister? You wouldn't make a bad special pleader.'

'I!' ejaculated Leonard. 'Why, I have no chance of either. And I do not really like the law, though my education in it thus far has been advantageous.'

'And may help me in disentangling this web,' said Mr. Moore. 'I hate intricacies of all kinds, but, when we have got through this, let me know whether I can serve you in any way—give you a start for the Colonies, or otherwise help you.'

'I have often thought of emigrating,

and finding breathing-space away from this dense atmosphere,' replied Leonard. 'But I see so many failures resulting from impatience of one's present position, that prudence always says, "Stick to a certainty, however small."'

'Very wise. With such a common-sense view of life, you are pretty sure to succeed in it,' remarked Mr. Moore.

The day following this conversation, he had an interview with Mr. Charles Conquest, during which he mentioned as much as he thought proper of his sister's antecedents, and begged him to find out her marriage, if married she was. As he knew about the year when it must have taken place, and opined that it was in Bristol, he gave tolerably clear instructions; but he did not think it necessary to say that she was his half-sister, or that she had been housekeeper at the manor.

When this was done, he inquired, in his matter-of-fact way, what that good-looking, shrewd, clever young fellow, Leonard Leigh, was going to become.

'Leigh! A lawyer, I suppose,' replied Mr. Charles Conquest, awaking from a business reverie, into which Mr. Moore had plunged him.

'How can that be? He is only a clerk, and there is no money. How does he live? His uncle told me he never applied to him for money, and had no private means.'

'I declare, it never came into my head to ask him. And, now I think of it, he is not absolutely an articled clerk, though one looks upon him as such. His uncle made no stir in the matter when he came here, and I was content to give him work —which he does capitally—and a small salary. Not much, now I think of it.

But my brother has put him into his chambers.'

'You have never been to see him there?'

'I? No, I think not. I never have time. But I will go, and I will see into this matter. We must raise his salary, and think over his future, and—and—but the fact is, in London, if a young fellow does not push himself, he is nowhere.'

'The same all the world over. As the American poet says—I don't know his name—"Keep pushing; 'tis wiser than standing aside."'

'The fact is, Mr. Moore, that competition is so great, population increases so alarmingly, and the pressure of work is so exhausting that——'

Mr. Conquest paused.

'That we shall be all lunatics before long,' supplied Mr. Moore.

'True. A celebrated physician said to me the other day, "We may as well build asylums instead of workhouses, or turn the unions into madhouses, for, if this high-pressure system lasts, we shall all be off our heads."'

'A mad world, sir! Well, not a bad notion. There will be equality at last, which is what the people want. I hope young Leigh won't overdo it, for he seems to have as many brains as most, and he looks as if he used 'em. I hope you'll look after him. Good morning.'

'He thinks we've neglected him, and so, perhaps, we have,' mused Charles Conquest. 'I'll look into it at once.'

He summoned Leonard from an inner office in which he now habitually worked.

'I want to ask what your plans are, Leigh,' he began, abruptly.

'In what way, sir? I have no plans,

except that of seeing my friends the d'Angères off to-morrow, if I can be spared.'

'I mean for your future life. Are you thinking of taking out your stamps?'

Leonard looked astonished.

'I cannot do that, sir. In the first place, I have no money, and in the second I have my doubts as to whether I should ever make a good lawyer.'

It was now Charles Conquest's turn to look surprised.

'Why, you are one already in knowledge, if not in name. What bee have you got in your bonnet?'

'It is rather in my conscience, sir. I cannot go into the law with all my heart.'

'But you work for us with all your heart—how is that?'

'As a servant I obey, but as master I must lead. However, I have no choice at present, as I can barely keep myself.'

'You have done your duty by us, Leigh, and I mean to raise your salary. What will enable you to save enough to begin life on your own account, and to change your quarters?'

Leonard's face flushed as he replied,

'Thank you, sir, I leave the amount to you; 'but does Mr. Conquest wish me to leave the Buildings? I should be sorry to do so.'

'Not that I know of. But I hear you are wretchedly housed, half starved, and heaven knows what more.'

'I have everything I need. Besides, I can be of some use to Mr. Conquest there, and, after all, I do not do much more than sleep there.'

'Very well. Let that alone for the present. I am bent on making a lawyer of you, and you must arrange with your conscience as soon as possible. Meanwhile,

I wish you to run down to Bristol and see about a marriage certificate we want to get hold of. What time do the d'Angères leave?'

'By the early tidal train, sir.'

'Then you can start in the afternoon. I may as well give you instructions at once and money for expenses, since you are so poor.'

Leonard had some difficulty in keeping his own especial secret from Charles Conquest. He was to be entrusted with the very search he was most anxious to make, and he felt that, if anyone could discover the certificate, he was the man; for had he not the key to the enigma in the name Lisle, if an enigma there were to be solved?

He left the office that afternoon in a very excited state of mind. He wanted a confidante, but none was near, not even

Pluckrose. His thoughts turned at once to Aveline, but he had not seen her since the evening he spent at Hampstead. He had heard incidentally that she, the d'Angères, and the pets had been invited to prolong their stay at that delightful spot for a few days, and had received a note from the chevalier to ask him to meet them at the station on the morrow. When Mr. Conquest, senior, had given him the note, he had ventured an inquiry concerning the conduct of Jacquot, Frou-Frou, and Loulou, and had received for answer that 'the d'Angères' charming protégée prevented all collision of those odious beasts with my wife.' Leonard smiled as he remembered how that Aveline used to be called his protégée, and tried to feel gratified that so many people older and more sensible than himself seemed now to have adopted her. How

he wished for an invitation to Hampstead that last evening!

Not receiving it, however, he sought and found Mr. Moore. That gentleman was sympathetic, and congratulated him warmly on his prospect of increased salary and the intended visit to Bristol.

'I think I had a hand in it,' he said, significantly. '"A word to the wise," you know. I told that dry piece of parchment, my old friend Charles, that you deserved better things, and he has wakened up to the fact. But I never expected so strange a coincidence as that you should be chosen for the rummaging out of the old registers. I will run down to Bristol with you and look up all the places casually named in the letters, while you inspect the churches. Now you must come and dine with me, and drink success to our cause. For my part, I always come in for

work, and, between you and me, I like it. Lisle is dreadfully slow. If I can establish the fact of my sister's marriage, I shall soon run away from it.'

They went to Mr. Moore's club, and had a good dinner. Leonard was in buoyant spirits, and his new friend was so well pleased with him that he began to talk seriously to him of emigration. Leonard did not discourage him, and, before the evening was spent, he had been promised introductions enough in South Australia to ensure a fortune as a lawyer.

The next morning he kept his appointment at Victoria Station. In the bustle and confusion of luggage and pets, there was little time for conversation. Happily Mr. Conquest's footman was used to similar turmoil, and saw to most things.

'You will soon come to us at Fontainebleau, my friend Léonard,' said the cheva-

lier, who was keeping guard over the parrot's well-enveloped cage.

'We had a delicious visit at my sister's. They took us everywhere, and invited guests each evening,' said madame. 'We have not been so fêted since we were in France on our marriage tour. And now we are going there again; it will be delightful. Mr. Conquest and Sophia are in such good society that you would have been surprised, Leonard, at the rank and tone of their parties.'

'Did you enjoy it, Aveline? Were you one of them?' asked Leonard.

'Oh, yes! everyone was kind and I have seen many sights,' replied Aveline, but the voice was choked by ill-restrained emotion.

She stood in the midst of bundles of wraps, one dog in her arms, the other held by a string. She was much jostled in the

mélée, and he went to her aid. The gates opened at the same moment, and luggage and passengers poured through. He caught up Frou-Frou and one bundle, while a porter took the others. The footman was waiting on madame, the chevalier on the parrot. The latter was consigned to the guard's van, and the chevalier joined Aveline, with the words,

'Now for la belle France, ma petite.'

But her eyes were full of tears, her lips quivering.

'You—you will come, Mr. Leonard?' she murmured, as they stood a moment, side by side, on the platform.

'I hope so, Aveline. It is not good-bye, but *au revoir*.'

He was never likely to forget the tender, loving, appealing face turned towards him. Pure with the innocence of childhood, anxious with the solicitude of womanhood.

He held her hand a moment, and the yearning sorrow and affection of the protector he had once been, swelled in his heart.

'Believe in me as in a brother, dear Aveline,' he said, as he placed her in the carriage, and lifted in Frou-Frou after her.

But he saw the sweet face no more. He knew that she was weeping at parting from him.

A warm pressure of the hand from the chevalier, with repeated invitations, kisses of the tips of madame's dainty gloves, a little yelp from the dogs, consigned to their basket beneath the seat, the arrangement of many parcels, the 'last fond look' of the porter waiting for a douceur, the closing of doors, the signal of the guard, the whistle of the engine, and the train was off. Many passengers glanced from the

windows at friends left behind; but not Aveline. Leonard remained a moment as in a dream, then turned sadly to the world again, remembering that he was about to start for Bristol, there to search musty registers in the fond hope of piecing together a past history, while the present was ever shifting, and as intangible and even unreal as what had gone before.

CHAPTER IX.

LA BELLE ANGLAISE

'WE will return to Fontainebleau Cottage, at our beloved Carisbroke, ma mie.'

'But it is unfurnished and let to another, mon Alphonse.'

'We shall find a more suitable abode, mon chou. Larger and more to our taste.'

'It is certainly disappointing, Alphonse.'

These were the moans that succeeded the transplantation to France. The Che-

valier d'Angère found his beloved Belle Vue in a very dilapidated state. It was an old château, or country house, surrounded by gardens and grounds on the outskirts of the forest of Fontainebleau. When he left it as a boy with his father, it was a flourishing property, but during their years of exile it had passed through many hands, and he soon discovered that it was little better than an aristocratic barn. The wind made terrible inroads through doors, windows, parquets, and innumerable crannies; the ancient furniture was crazy; the tapestries moth-eaten; the painting neglected. All was, in short, tumbling to pieces.

The journey from London had been everything that was delightful, and Madame d'Angère's spirits had risen to their highest degree; but, when she found herself in this crazy mansion, they sank com-

mensurately. Only a fiacre to convey her to her new home; and this, driven through creaky iron gates, over a weedy avenue, and up to a shaky door. No ancient retainers, no fireworks, no sort of welcome. It was *affreux.*

How she got through the first few days, neither she nor her devoted companions knew; but she passed them in a continued wail of disappointment. The chevalier was in despair, but Aveline did her best to cheer both him and madame.

'It is delicious, it is glorious!' she argued. 'Look at the autumn tints on the great forest, dear madame. It covers more ground than all the island. See the magnificent palace, the cascades, the park, the gardens, the statues, dear monsieur; there is much pride in being born near such a spot.'

'Ours is not the palace, but this tum-

ble-down château,' persisted madame, wiping away her tears.

'I should be indifferent but for my dear woife,' said the chevalier.

'But the peasants are so nice, the townspeople so polite, and when the neighbours call it will be like the manor. We must make the place smart against the *grande noblesse* appears, dear madame. If I might arrange the furniture, and if you would put on that lovely new dress, we might be ready. The dogs are so happy. You should see them poking their noses into the holes after the mice, and racing through the large rooms. Then the air is so inspiriting! If only you would come out, dear madame, you would rise like—like a balloon. I feel as if I must fly.'

'I wish I could, Aveline, and then, perhaps, I should not be afraid of the ghosts. I am sure I saw one last night. I suppose

a spirit with wings would be swifter than a ghost without them.'

'Ha ha, you have propound a problem for the scientifique, ma mie. But you are clever!' laughed the chevalier. 'You remember how my compatriots did call you *la belle Anglaise?* How they will still admire you in that beautiful robe of which la petite speaks. Had we only that unready money, we would make our Belle Vue a Paradise.'

'I will try on that dress, Aveline,' sighed madame, and a glance of satisfaction passed between the young girl and the elderly Frenchman.

This was not unobserved by Madame d'Angère, whose thoughts reverted to Quiz. However, she preceded Aveline through the polished passages and staircase to her room, an apartment hung with faded blue damask, and adorned with many mirrors

and much gilding. Here she put on the dress, and forgot, for the moment, her grievances in the reflection of her person, so attired, in the various mirrors that interspersed the damask.

'This might make a sensation in Paris, but here it is Newport reproduced,' she sighed.

'Only put on your bonnet and come and see, dear madame. The jalousied windows and white-capped people would show you how different it is.'

'How long have we been here, Aveline? You seem to have seen everything, and I nothing.'

'Scarcely three days, dear madame, but I noticed much as we drove here, and have lost no time in looking at what immediately surrounds us. If you would accompany the chevalier and me on a tour of discovery, you would find much to amuse you.

And you look so beautiful in that dress, and dear monsieur is so heart-broken at your disappointment, that you must try to raise his spirits by visiting his old haunts with him.'

With a little more persuasion, Madame d'Angère's forced seclusion was broken through. Her nerves and expectations had been so shattered that she had resisted all previous entreaties to leave the château. Attended by her husband, Aveline, and the dogs, and followed by a 'Bon voyage' from the parrot, she left the musty drawing-room for the cheerful town. The chevalier was delighted to see his wife herself again, for, as he pioneered her through the broad streets and over the rough causeways, those desirable words, 'La belle Anglaise,' followed them. He did not pause to think whether they were meant for the younger or the

older belle, but, with commendable astuteness, whispered,

'Listen, ma mie; I told you so.'

'Ah, mon Alphonse, you are a flattering race,' she replied, picking her way delicately over the pebbly pavement. 'But your sabots are necessary here. Frou-Frou and Loulou can scarcely walk at all.'

'They will accustom themselves to the change, ma mie.'

Aveline followed, gazing and wondering. The roughly-paved streets did not trouble her any more than they seemed to trouble the horses that dragged omnibus or fiacre up and down the hill to the palace. Neither did she remark that the people looked at her as she passed. She only fancied that they all lived out of doors, and that they talked rapidly, cheerfully, and incessantly. Their costume and clattering sabots enchanted her, as

did the bright houses, with their white jalousies, the quaint, forest-girdled town, and the public buildings to which the chevalier introduced her.

'These are the cavalry barracks which Captain Moore is so anxious to see,' he explained, to her and his wife, as they wandered on. 'Here is the college at which I was placed when a boy. Behold the magnificent château d'eau, which holds the water to supply the palace. But we will visit the palace to-morrow. You see that we have also our hospitals. Anne of Austria was foundress of one; Madame De Montespan of another. And the obelisk! I weep when I welcome it again. You remember, ma petite! It was erected to celebrate the birthday of the infants of the unhappy Marie Antoinette. You almost broke your heart when reading them. Bah! Let us pass on.'

Tears did really overflow the girl's eyes as she gazed on the obelisk, and remembered the fate of the royal children it commemmorated; but there was a bitterness in her protector's voice which forbade her lingering. She perceived also that he was sad, despite his best efforts to be cheerful. He was a stranger in the place of his birth. No one recognized him, and, as he pointed out each object of interest, he was looked upon as one of the many tourists of many nationalities that came daily to visit the memorable hunting-box of kings and emperors.

'Trop tard! trop tard,' he muttered to himself.

'All your old friends will flock to you when they hear you have arrived,' consoled Aveline. 'You desired to be incognito for a time.'

'It was but to discover if our family

were remembered, ma petite. But we are forgotten as if we had never been.'

'So many people seem to have occupied the Belle Vue since you left it, dear monsieur.'

'Yes, one régime takes, the next gives, the third keeps, a fourth restores,' he said, with a long-drawn sigh.

'It is not quite what I expected,' broke in madame. 'But it is curious; I already like it better than I did.'

This little attempt to please her Alphonse had its due effect, and that volatile spirit seized her hand with effusion, took a large pinch of snuff, and was himself again, for a few hours at least.

'I shall, doubtless, find some friends of my youth by-and-by,' he said, glancing up and down the Fontainebleau streets, 'and they will admire my Amicia and the petite. We shall have réunions, and

be *toujours gais*, is it not, ma mie?'

'We shall still miss those we have left behind.'

This was said plaintively.

'Certes; but we have still Loulou and Frou-Frou, and Aveline. Let us be happy again. Take you my arm, and we visit the barracks, to remind you of our dear Parkhurst.'

By degrees, madame forgot her lamentations, and, when they returned to the château, she appeared tolerably cheerful; but she did not accommodate herself to circumstances, as the chevalier hoped.

It was now that Aveline developed many talents. She had no one to depress, no one to criticise, and, seeing that her kind friends were not only disappointed, but disheartened, she took upon herself to cheer them. The fact was that the chevalier had been in too great a

hurry, and had returned to his small patrimony unexpectedly. The letters he had written to the lawyer who had announced its restoration were not strictly attended to, and, instead of finding either servants or preparations, there was only an old man, his wife, and daughter in the house. They had been placed there as care-takers, and had done what they could to tidy up for the new-comers. This was not much; so Aveline had a wide scope for her ingenuity. Thanks to the good French the chevalier had taught her, she was able to make friends with Jean Lalage, his wife Marthe, and his daughter Fanchon. Jean remembered the chevalier's father, but had no particular interest in his family, so Aveline created one by describing how bravely he had borne his exile. Then she discoursed to Marthe upon the virtues of

madame, her benevolence to herself, and her devotion to her husband, and finally won Fanchon's love by one or two small gifts.

They all began to work with a will under her direction, and, by a little tact, she prevailed on the chevalier to work with them. Forest and palace were forgotten in sweeping, dusting, carpentering, cooking, and renovating, and by degrees the old house began to look more like home. He was encouraged to go into his affairs with his lawyer, and to ascertain how he stood. Shakily enough, he found, when he had made himself master of them. He possessed the old château and the surrounding grounds, together with a field or two; but to regain what else had formerly belonged to his family, would entail law-suits and proceedings that were contrary to his principles.

'There are revolutions and revolutions. Let them revolve for me. I take what they have left me, and wish myself back in England, where, for the present, there are none,' he philosophised.

'Let us return,' sighed madame.

But her tone changed, when, as Aveline had prophesied, the neighbours came to pay their devoirs. With the first carriage that rolled up the avenue, rolled off a portion of the clouds that obscured Madame d'Angère's vision. She was enchanted with the lively, elegant manners of the ladies, and the polite speeches of the gentlemen; but, above all, was she delighted to see her Alphonse resume his position in society.

'Is he not an elegant man, Aveline? What a distinguished manner he has when he bows and takes snuff! I always thought so; but now I am quite

sure of it,' she repeatedly remarked.

'You were discerning enough to discover the true gold,' replied Aveline, who admired the chevalier quite as much as did his wife.

With society returned the love of dress, and Aveline had more than she could do in striving to aid Madame d'Angère to keep pace with French fashion. She had not, herself, time for regrets. Indeed she had not many sources of regret. The loss of her mother was a life-long pain, which time softened but did not cure—the separation from Leonard was an unameliorated sorrow; for he did not write to her, and she was not one to jog his memory. With these two exceptions, she had never before been so free from care. Rich and poor were kind to her, and she was even courted as the young English beauty who

was the protégée of the Chevalier and Madame d'Angère.

It is not necessary here to enter into the details of the following months. Suffice it to write, that gradually a small establishment was formed, and that, with strict economy, they managed to live in some sort as befitted their position. But madame missed her sisters, her nieces, indeed her old friends generally, and the new acquaintances did not make up for their loss. Her French was not fluent, and she was jealous of the frequent appeals to mademoiselle to interpret certain idioms, or to give orders which she preferred to give herself. Aveline was in too great request, and all her tact was needed to maintain her position of dependence. Formerly the outside world sought to keep her down, now it did its best to elevate her; and it was not easy for a girl

of her age to secure the juste milieu. Moreover, Madame d'Angère's health suffered during the severe winter, and she mourned over the absence of English fires, and the difficulty of procuring English food. The chevalier was in despair, and declared his intention of returning to England, unless England would come to him.

Still how happy he was in exploring, with Aveline, the palace and forest of Fontainebleau. How their spirits rose or fell with the memories connected with these remarkable spots. As to Aveline, she lived, in imagination, through the ages. She wandered through the now silent courts and galleries of the enormous palace, and conjured up the forms of historical personages, from the time of Francis I., and even before, to that of Napoleon III. She wept burning tears in the exquisite suite of rooms prepared for

Marie Antoinette by the hapless Louis XVI., and subsequently occupied by a Josephine and an Eugénie, in their turn also unfortunate. She learnt history, as the chevalier expressed it, as a vue d'œil. Then, in the great forest, she moralised over the rendezvous de chasse, where the knights and ladies of the palace met to hunt; but nothing touched her feelings more than to hear that, within the memory of those to whom she loved to talk, the Napoleonic family had been wont to frequent the forest. She soon won the hearts of the sellers of various wares, stationed here and there in their wooden booths, and made the acquaintance of the guides and foresters; but, as the winter set in, the sixty miles of forest became comparatively empty of human denizens, since there were no longer tourists to purchase the pretty articles made of

the various forest woods, or to be pioneered to the valley of rocks, the hermitage, or a hundred other note-worthy parts.

But she was eminently sociable, so she followed guide or poor salesman to cottage or cabin, and so became known to the peasants. Now and again she would interest madame in her new friends and induce her to visit them, but the elder lady preferred to receive and return calls in the town and neighbourhood, and, so long as she was amused, the chevalier and Aveline were happy.

This amusement ceased, in a great measure, as the winter set in. Fontainebleau is a cold, bracing place, and Madame d'Angère had lived all her life in the mild atmosphere of the Isle of Wight. No efforts could make the château warm, and she suffered from the pure, clear air that

exhilarated the others. She shivered over the stove, while they rejoiced in the frost that weighed down the branches of the forest trees, and at last she actually took to her bed.

'What shall we do now, ma petite?' asked the disconsolate chevalier.

'It is only a severe cold. Perhaps a few days in bed may do her good,' returned Aveline. 'We must keep her warm, and amuse her.'

'Ma foi! that seems impossible. Nothing but letters from the island interests her. I have just given her one, and left her to read it, while I come, at her request, to hasten your preparations of the tisane.'

It must be understood that, when alone, the chevalier and Aveline conversed in French.

'If we can get through the winter, dear madame will be better,' sighed Aveline.

'I fear we must return to the island,' said the chevalier. 'How happy we were at the cottage when we were poor! Perhaps the letter she has just received may give her pleasure. Take her that tisane and I will follow.'

Aveline had some sort of posset in her hand, and she carried it upstairs. Madame was sitting up in bed, letter in one hand, golden *pince-nez* in the other. She was exclaiming in displeased astonishment as Aveline entered. The blue ribbons of her lace nightcap shook with indignation, and Loulou was aroused from sleep as she lay on the coverlet.

'I will never believe it. If the Pope of Rome or the Archbishop of Canterbury had written the letter instead of sister Dallimore, I would not believe it. Ask the chevalier to come here at once,' she exclaimed.

Aveline laid down the tisane and went to summon the anxious husband.

'Madame is in much trouble. The letter has distressed her,' she said.

'I come, I come. Would there were either no island or no Fontainebleau,' replied monsieur, following Aveline to his wife's *appartement*.

CHAPTER X.

THE ICE-BOUND FOREST.

'YOU can remain, Aveline. It is evidently no secret,' said Madame d'Angère, putting the letter into the chevalier's hand.

'But I do not understand, my friend. It is all Greek for me. And Madame Dallimore, she write so small and indistinct that I never read her characters fluently. Shall the petite read it aloud?' said monsieur.

'Yes, it can be no secret. Mr. Moore has doubtless published it already,' replied the excited madame.

The letter was placed in Aveline's hand. She was standing at the foot of the bed, the chevalier at the side. She read it as well as she could, but Mrs. Dallimore wrote illegibly, and she had some difficulty in deciphering it. Like the chevalier, she almost failed to understand what it meant. But madame's running commentary enlightened them both.

'If they were to swear it, I would not believe it. He so particular about such things. A woman of that stamp! Registers indeed! A hundred years ago.'

'But, ma mie, it cannot be so long. Thou art scarcely yet a century old, and thou recollectest the individuals.'

'If I were two centuries old, I would never credit it,' returned Madame, beginning to shed tears.

Her husband put his arms round her in consolatory fashion, and Aveline exclaimed,

'But, dear madame, it does not seem a matter of importance. Only a second marriage, and it accounts for those two graves in Lisle churchyard. It is very pathetic.'

'Pathetic!' echoed Madame d'Angère. 'What next? Sister Dallimore is as much disgusted as I am.'

'Read to the end, child, and we will debate it quietly. Be not troubled, my Amicia. We escape, being here.'

The letter contained the announcement that in the church of St. Mary, Redcliff, Bristol, had been found, duly registered, the marriage of Worsley Lisle, gentleman and widower, and Marian Cunninghame, spinster. In language somewhat discursive and vehement, Mrs. Dallimore informed her sister that Mr. Moore was a snake in the grass. That he was the half-brother of the Cunninghame whom

they all remembered as maid and housekeeper at Lisle, and that he had, apparently, come to reside there to spy upon every one.

'And would you believe it? The intended matches are still to come off in the spring?' she wrote in parenthesis. 'I would not let my girls marry into such a family.'

She proceeded to relate what we already know, as well as some particulars which we do not know. She wrote that, having procured the certificate of the marriage, Mr. Moore had proceeded to investigate places, and had discovered evidence sufficient to put beyond a doubt that their uncle, the squire, had actually been privately married to this Cunninghame, and had lived from time to time at Bristol and Bath. As Mrs. Dallimore did not mention either Mr. Charles Conquest or Leonard, we may

suppose that their participation in the discovery was not made public.

'Can you imagine such iniquity, my dear Amicia,' concluded Mrs. Dallimore. 'He, who never forgave his own daughter because she married against his will, to do a thousand times worse himself. However, it cannot matter to us. My Lisle will have the property, and the gossip will blow over. At present the island is full of it. I wonder Mr. Moore can show his face, and he the brother of the woman. My girls are indignant, particularly Quiz, who, by the way, has settled to pay her visit to you in the spring. I only hope she will snub Captain Moore. Dear Lisle grows very fast, and is not strong.'

'I had such a pretty letter from him today,' said Aveline, interrupting herself.

'It is the wickedest, shamefulest thing

I ever knew,' sobbed Madame la Chevalière. 'But I am glad, Alphonse, that I am out of it. We, at least, have made no mis-alliance.'

This letter roused Madame d'Angère and depressed Aveline. The former talked of nothing else the whole day, and the latter sympathised. Madame recalled every minute circumstance connected with Mrs. Lisle's maid and the squire's housekeeper, but failed to charge her with conduct unbecoming her situation. She acknowledged that, from her recollection of her, she must have been a superior person, and very handsome. But she lost sight of her when she went abroad with Mrs. Lisle, and could remember little concerning her, until about six months after that lady's death at Mentone, when she returned to the manor as housekeeper.

'I should never have supposed that

Uncle Lisle cared for her,' she said. 'She must have been there two or three years, when they quarelled, and she left. If he really married her, it must have been soon after. I was a child at the time, and used to stay with Cousin Lucy. Excuse me, but I cannot think of her without weeping. The dear was fond of Cunninghame —I must confess that—but she little knew what a viper she was fostering. Shocking! Preposterous! Had she lived, she would have been her step-mother. And the squire to have objected to mon Alphonse!'

'He liked no one to be happy but himself,' laughed the chevalier, with a tender glance at his wife.

'I hope he was happy,' sighed Aveline, whose temporary cheerfulness had been checked, more by the announcement of

Quiz's intended visit than by that of the marriage.

'He was too proud and bad-tempered to be happy with anyone,' replied Madame d'Angère, with asperity. 'But they must have been separated; for he scarcely left the manor at one time of his life. I declare, it was just before she came there to die. It was very wrong of him not to acknowledge the marriage. Don't you think so, Alphonse?'

'It matters not what I think, ma mie. He was misanthrope; but we will hope he repented at that last interview.'

'How awful that must have been!' broke in Aveline, with a shudder. 'To see her die before him, and yet not to acknowledge her. But he must have loved her, or he would not have been buried by her side. And we were at his funeral, my dear mamma and I.'

'Pray try to forget that, Aveline. It makes me nervous. What does Lisle say?'

Aveline produced an enormous letter, consisting of a sheet of ruled foolscap, covered with straggling hieroglyphics. It was full of questions concerning the dogs and parrot, and inquiries as to Aveline's return. The writer, whatever his faults, did not forget his friend. It concluded with the assurance that nobody had seen the epistle; for he had written it all by himself, and that he still loved her better than anyone else in the world. Unfortunately, he did not mention his aunt, and this aroused her little jealousy. It was curious how the slumbering hedgehog bristled up at a sound.

'The child is allowed to forget me. I suppose you do not name me when you write,' she said.

'Oh yes, dear madame. I write of nothing but of you and our life here,' Aveline replied.

The following day was Sunday, and Madame d'Angère aroused herself sufficiently to rise and attend the Protestant place of worship, which was not far from the Belle Vue. The chevalier was descended from an old Huguenot family, therefore the simple service of the reformed faith was acceptable to him, as it was to Aveline, who loved simplicity; but Madame d'Angère was disappointed at finding in it none of the grandeur of the Catholic hierarchy. However, she attended as a matter of course, and did her best to understand the prayers and extempore sermon of their friend the good Pasteur Candide.

The small church was prettily situated in the midst of villas and trees, and Ave-

line was learning to love it and its pastor who came occasionally to the Belle Vue. As the congregation left it, and while the chevalier and madame were interchanging greetings with some of its members, she was startled by the words in English,

'How do you do, Miss Roone? I am sure you will be surprised at seeing me.'

Turning, she recognised Captain Moore. She certainly was surprised, and coloured perceptibly as she shook hands with him, and said heartily how glad she was to see him. The most indifferent person in the world would have been warmly welcomed if he came from England. Captain Moore had been kind to her, though she was half-afraid of him, because he was dictatorial. He showed undisguised pleasure at meeting her, and hastily explained his appearance by saying that he had come over on a short visit to a French officer, stationed at

the barracks, whom he had met some years before. The explanation was somewhat lame, but she did not consider it so; on the contrary, she eagerly touched Madame d'Angère's shoulder, forgetting, for the moment, the offensive episode of the Lisle and Cunninghame marriage.

Madame forgot it also, apparently, in her delight at a familiar face; so did the chevalier, and the captain was invited to return with them to the Belle Vue, whither he was, in fact, going. He was, however, not alone, having with him his friend of the cavalry barracks, Monsieur le Capitaine de Bellefontaine. Introductions followed, and the chevalier exclaimed,

'You must be the son of my old schoolfellow, Auguste de Bellefontaine. I shall, at last, find a friend. Is your father living?'

This question was answered in the af-

firmative, and, on comparing notes, it was found that the Marquis de Bellefontaine, père, had been at the college of Fontainebleau with the chevalier. He lived, however, at a distance.

They all walked together to the Belle Vue; the French officer between the chevalier and Madame, the English behind them with Aveline. The former took his leave at the door, promising to call again, the latter went in.

'You will stay to luncheon, or more properly déjeuner, Captain Moore,' said madame, who had suddenly recovered her natural manner. 'You certainly were not at church?'

'No. De Bellefontaine is a good Catholic, and scarcely liked being seen so near an heretical edifice. But I saw Miss Roone coming out.'

Aveline's beaming face seemed to tell a

hundred tales. It was all radiance and dimples. But madame's clouded a little when Aveline was again the first to have been seen and noticed. But Aveline soon disappeared to superintend the déjeuner—as Madame d'Angère insisted on calling the midday meal, French fashion—and Captain Moore began the subject of the squire's second marriage. He was a resolute man, and seldom paused to consider whether his manner or words were likely to please or give offence.

'It is strange that we should be in some sort connections, Madame d'Angère. I feel honoured by that fact, though not by the chain of circumstances which led up to it.'

'I should think not, indeed,' replied the lady, bridling up. 'I do not believe in the marriage. My uncle was not the sort of man.'

'But the register and the date, Madame d'Angère?'

'They must be false. I daresay Cunninghame put them in.'

'Ma bien aimée!' ejaculated the chevalier, and the captain looked displeased.

'She was my father's sister, Madame d'Angère.'

'Oh! to be sure. I quite forgot. What could have induced him to rake up so queer a story? What will he get by it?'

'Nothing but the satisfaction of knowing that his sister was honourably married, and that she must have left her situation to become a wife.'

'How did Mr. Moore suspect it?' asked the chevalier.

'I cannot imagine. Probably because Mrs. Lisle returned to the manor so strangely, and her husband chose to be

buried near her. My father is still making inquiries, and will not rest until he finds out the why and the wherefore. It was on her account, I find, that he rented the manor.'

Aveline came in, to announce the déjeuner, and interrupted a conversation which was growing unpleasant. Captain Moore was of a choleric temperament, easily excited to anger, and he did not like Madame d'Angère's tone. He was verging on forty, and was not to be offended with impunity. Indeed madame shrank beneath the glance of his green-grey eyes, and the fierce curl of his reddish moustache. The eyes softened, however, at sight of Aveline. She carried a large, blue woollen shawl, ready folded for enveloping her benefactress, and was about to place it round her, when he took it, and performed the duty carefully.

'You certainly need wraps this weather,' he said. 'What a grand view you have of the frost-bound forest. I am longing for a ramble beneath that crystal roof. I only reached Fontainebleau last night, and I have not long to stay. Will anyone go with me into those fairy halls?'

He glanced at Aveline.

'It is a scene of enchantment,' she returned. 'But the peasants hope it will soon melt away. Dear madame, I wish you would walk into the long galleries under the fantastic arches before they disappear. The sun is warm to-day, and your cold is better.'

'Pray do, madame. I should then be able to tell Mrs. Churchhouse that we explored the forest in company,' said the captain.

'What say you, ma mie?' asked the chevalier, anxiously, as he held out his

hand to lead her to the dining-room.

'Perhaps, in my fur cloak, my fur boots, my Shetland veil, I might make the effort,' she replied.

Accordingly, after the déjeuner, they all sallied forth. It was not far from the Belle Vue to one of the gates of the forest, and they were soon within its frozen precincts. Madame d'Angère, leaning on the chevalier's arm, picked her way daintily among the rustling leaves and fallen branches with which the avenues were strewn, and the captain grew impatient. The chevalier perceived it.

'You had better conduct Monsieur le Capitaine to the great rendezvous de chasse, ma petite, and we will follow. You will both walk more quickly than we shall,' he suggested.

Captain Moore looked at Madame d'An-

gère as if for her opinion, and the submission pleased her.

'You can precede us, as I am not strong enough to walk quickly,' she said; and, when he and Aveline were out of hearing, she added, 'I rejoice to be walking once more *tête-à-tête* with you, mon Alphonse.'

The forest was, as Aveline said, a scene of enchantment. The frost was unusually severe and prolonged, and the Erl King had laid his hand on every branch and twig, brier and withered leaf. The sun gleamed on a vast canopy of crystal, for the intertwining branches were bound together by ice and rime so firmly that the wind and the beam failed to loosen them, and only now and again could heaven's azure look through. Here and there huge icicles weighed down and snapped the white stems of the young birch and lay

with them on the ground; while the larger trees wore these fine necklaces and ear-drops royally. The broad, gravelled avenues were spangled with jewels; the underwood assumed the most fantastic shapes; domes, arches, minarets, colonnades, intertwined in labyrinthine, diamond-adorned beauty, and fifty or sixty miles of forest lay mute and motionless under the ice monarch's irresistible wand.

Aveline regarded it with awe and admiration. As she trod down the crisp rime in her light and rapid walk, she pointed out its wonders almost breathlessly.

She fancied she saw the Black Huntsman of evil omen, said to have appeared to Henri IV. before his assassination, riding through the spectral arches to the very spot they were hastening to reach, and wondered whether he roamed the forest

when the hunt was, like the trees, spell-bound by the frost. She told Captain Moore many of the historical events she had learnt connected with certain points which they passed, and he listened—listened as if he too were frost-fettered, for he did not speak at all.

'Here is the great *rendezvous de chasse*. *La croix du grand veneur*, named after the spectral huntsman,' she exclaimed, as they reached an open space in the midst of the forest, where a large obelisk was erected, and where four roads met. 'Think of the gatherings of kings and courtiers, and fair ladies, that have happened here for eight centuries. It is melancholy to look back. A forester told me that he had himself seen the little Prince Imperial ride here to cover with his father, Napoleon, on his pony. And he said the emperor and empress were

much beloved. Now, forest and palace are silent as the grave, and they are——'

'Aveline,' interrupted Captain Moore, who stood gazing on the girl's eloquent and beautiful countenance. 'Aveline, I did not come to Fontainebleau to visit either its forest or its palace. I came to see you. I have something to say to you that nearly concerns us both. Listen.'

Aveline turned her face from the great cross towards which she was pointing, and looked at him inquiringly. He was silent no longer. There, in the vast solitude, beneath the enormous cross, in the midst of the ice-bound forest, rapidly but in all sincerity, he made her a proposal of marriage. He told her that he had loved her at first sight, and that there was no impediment to his making her his wife. He said his parents were fond of her, and

would make no objection, that he believed the chevalier and madame favoured him, that he could marry at once, that she was fitted for any exalted position—in short, that he was madly in love.

As he pleaded his cause, he heeded not the intense cold, nor considered the strangeness of the position. He knew that he was alone with her, and seized the opportunity to tell his tale. Not a sound broke the stillness save his own agitated voice, and the mysterious crackings of the ice around him. In vain he paused at intervals for a word in response, but none came. Aveline gazed at him in mute astonishment, dumb as the frost-bound Nature about her, motionless as the stone cross beneath which she stood, white as the rime that covered the ground. Her eyes were fixed in amazement, her lips parted, her hands

clasped; it was as if *le grand veneur* had appeared before her, instead of this passionate and devoted lover, and that she were palsied by some sudden terror. Indeed, had the spectral horseman of the forest actually come to announce to her some impending evil, she could not have been more alarmed. She could not believe that the speech to which she listened was really addressed to her, and a thousand fears troubled her. She realised nothing.

At last Captain Moore ceased speaking, and was made aware of her blanched cheeks and wondering eyes. He came close to her, and the movement aroused her. She gave a terrified start, as he laid his hand on her arm.

'What is it, Aveline? What have you to say to me? One word—only one word?' he urged.

'I cannot—I cannot,' she gasped; turned, and fled rapidly down the broad alley through which they had come.

CHAPTER XI.

'I CANNOT, I CANNOT.'

THE Chevalier and Madame d'Angère walked leisurely on after their younger companions. He was describing to her the haunts and occupations of his childhood; she was listening as earnestly as the intense cold would let her. It was not quite a day to pick your way over rime avenues and under ice-laden trees; still she tripped along much as if she were stepping through the ruts of Lisle village, holding up her dress, and surveying the fur boots. The chevalier was pointing out an ancient oak that stood

majestic among myriads of sapling beeches, when he was surprised by the sight of Aveline. She was hurrying towards them as if some disaster had happened, and startled Madame d'Angère, who was always ready to be alarmed. She looked so flushed and frightened that it was no wonder they both asked, simultaneously, what was the matter.

'Nothing,' replied the breathless girl. 'Captain Moore is following. But tell him that I cannot—I cannot.'

'Cannot what?' asked the chevalier; but she had passed him by like an arrow, and was darting down the avenue when he looked after her.

Captain Moore soon appeared in the distance, but did not seem to be pursuing her. As he approached, it was apparent that he was ruffled, and his cheeks were redder than his whiskers.

'What has happened to la petite?' asked the chevalier.

'Something that would gratify most girls, but seems to have offended her,' replied the captain, with much irritation.

'She is very peculiar,' put in madame.

The trio turned, and walked slowly homewards; at first almost in silence; after a short space in brisk discourse.

'As you are her present protectors, perhaps I had better confide in you,' began the captain, in hot haste. 'I proposed for her, and she actually ran away from me, saying nothing in reply but, "I cannot, I cannot."'

'You probably took her by surprise,' returned the chevalier, smothering a laugh.

'You proposed for Aveline! That is wonderful!' exclaimed Madame d'Angère, stopping short and looking at him through the thick Shetland veil.

'I did; and am ready to repeat my proposal, through you, her—her—friends. She is the most beautiful, the most natural, and the sweetest girl I ever saw. Can you tell why she left me in so abrupt a manner?'

'It is her first proposal. You took her at unawares. She did not expect the honour. It alarmed her. She is impulsive,' said the chevalier, thoughtfully and cautiously. 'When I propose for my dear woife, I have taught her the verb "to love" for two years at least first. She is prepared; she know what to say. La petite is but a child, and has not yet learnt the verb *aimer*. You must teach her.'

'How? She is in France, I in England —or I shall be in a day or so. I came over on purpose.'

'Such a match!' exclaimed madame, unable to recover from her surprise.

'Your brothers about to marry our nieces, and Aveline a poor, penniless girl, without a relation in the world!'

'She should share all mine, Madame d'Angère. She is a born lady, whatever her parentage.'

'Perhaps she disapproves your making your proposition on a Sunday. She is very religious,' said the puzzled chevalier.

'And very odd. You know her mother was out of her mind,' whispered madame, with no *malice prepense*.

'She is sane enough,' bristled the captain. 'I suppose she won't have me, but it was a very queer way of telling me so.'

'We will speak to her. You will return with us, and I will ask her what she means. You will see that she was frightened; she always say she like you much.'

'Liking is not loving. But she might

have given me a proper answer,' said the irritated officer.

They soon reached home, and the chevalier inquired of Fanchon where Aveline was.

'Mademoiselle is locked into her chamber, monsieur,' was the reply.

He was soon knocking at her door, and bidding her, with unusual authoritativeness, to come to him in *le boudoir de ma mère*. Thus he called a small apartment on the third storey which overlooked the forest, and which he loved from early associations. Aveline followed him thither, and they were soon joined by madame, who forgot the cold in the excitement. Aveline was in tears, and the chevalier's wrath vanished.

'What did you mean by "I cannot," ma petite?' he asked, taking her hand and placing her on a small couch that stood in the recess of the window.

'I scarcely know. I did not understand him. I did not like what he said to me. I could no longer listen to him,' she sobbed.

'What he said was clear, mon enfant. He wishes to marry you, and he asks you as a gentleman should. He has told us, my dear wife and me, and we cannot object to so good an offer. He is offended by your manner of receiving it, but he will condone the offence, if you will change your mind or think it over.'

'You want to get rid of me!' cried Aveline, clasping her hands. 'I have no wish to marry—I am so happy with you and dear madame.'

'Listen, ma petite. In this country you would have no choice. The captain would make his proposal to me as your father by adoption; I should accept it, because I know him to be a man of good fortune

and well placed, and you would marry with much delight.'

'Indeed I should not. I have never thought of marrying. I, a poor orphan, brought up by charity, taken by you, dear monsieur and madame, out of pity, and perhaps a little affection—I to marry one so much above me in birth and rank——'

'Between you and me, Aveline, there cannot be rank. Remember Cunninghame,' broke in madame.

'In position, fortune, education, everything,' she continued, rapidly. 'He is kind and good-natured—I like him very much. His father and mother were also very kind to me. But I will not leave you so long as you will let me stay. I still hope for the return of my dear mamma, for she was not drowned—indeed she was not drowned. I must be free to take care of her, and I thought I was some little

help to you, my protectors, but I perceive it is not so, since you wish me gone. Oh, I could not bear to part with you, and the dogs, and Jacquot, and the dear French people. I cannot, I cannot!'

She put her hands over her eyes and sobbed violently, while madame shed tears for sympathy. The kindly chevalier was at his wits' end.

'There is no reason in this, ma petite. You do not say you cannot love him, or that you love another better. Are these your reasons?'

She looked up frankly and innocently through her tears, as if surprised at the question.

'I have never thought of love or marriage in the way you mean, dear monsieur. I am always thinking of my dear mamma, you and madame, and the poor, and my first benefactor, Mr. Leonard.'

The chevalier smiled and madame interjected, 'Ah! it is Leonard, then!'

Aveline looked from one to the other, and a flush overspread her face.

'It is not what you think,' she said, hesitating, though without confusion. 'He has been always good to me. When I was a child and at the Blue School, he prevented my running away. His kind letter and your heavenly charity saved me from drowning myself when they said my dear mamma was found in the cold river. When he returned after years of absence, he was the same. We are both orphans, and we have understood one another. Were it not presumptuous in one like me, I should say he is as a brother to me; and, although we never meet nor write, I feel for him a sister's love.'

'Thou shalt do as thou wilt, ma petite,' said the chevalier, wiping his eyes and

then taking a pinch of snuff. 'But, such being the condition of thy young heart, perhaps thou wilt take time to consider this proposition of the excellent Captain Moore. It is one not to be thoughtlessly rejected, and madame et moi, we cannot live for ever.'

He held out his hand to his wife, and Aveline knelt down beside her and gazed into her face. The winter sun was setting, and his last red beams fell on the glacier-like forest and penetrated the half-jalousied windows.

'Thou art cold, ma mie,' said the chevalier, smoothing his wife's hand.

'And pale. There is no fire,' added Aveline.

'We will return to the salon and the captain. Come at once, my friends,' said the chevalier, forgetting all but madame's condition.

'I will stay here,' broke in Aveline, wrapping the shawl closely round Madame d'Angère.

'But you must see Captain Moore. You must say to him something more definite than those two words.'

'I should not know what more to say to him, dear monsieur. I would not give pain to one so kind, or anger or annoy him.'

'Send him a kind message—bid him hope. Such a fine match, and you without a penny,' put in madame, shivering.

'I cannot, I cannot,' was all Aveline could reply.

So her friends left her, and she remained alone in the embrasure of the cushioned window, with the red sun looking in upon her, and the white forest lying motionless beneath. Weeping, she tried to analyse feelings she could not

understand, and to realise her position, which was also incomprehensible to her.

Meanwhile her friends rejoined her lover. He was pacing the salon, and looked up anxiously when they entered. His countenance changed when no Aveline appeared, and he stamped his boot on the polished, uncarpeted floor. He was obliged to restrain his impatience while the chevalier drew up the fire for his half frozen wife, and enveloped her in fur couvrettes. This done, conversation began.

'Where is she? What does she say?' asked the captain.

'Wait a little, and you shall see,' replied the chevalier. 'You have been hasty, and she is unprepared. At present she says only, "I cannot." She is young, and it is her first proposition. In a year I wager she says, "I can." The

ladies turn round like the windmills of Montmartre. They are flying with wings to-day, quiet to-morrow. A change of wind, and they turn again.'

'Oh, mon Alphonse!' came from the sofa, and 'Fi donc! Alphonse,' from the parrot's cage.

The captain started, and looked round the darkening, old-fashioned room.

'It is only Jacquot, who differs from me,' laughed the chevalier. 'But if you take my advice you will leave the petite for some months—say wan year—and then, if you are of the same mind still, come again.'

'A year! I cannot be so long in suspense.'

'I have been tree year in suspense. But then, certainly, I see ma belle each week, and teach her the verb to love. Ha, ha! Why do the writers of the French

grammars select that verb for their pupils, I wonder? It is as embarrassing as the game écarté, when one proposes but does not marry.'

'You will be my friend, Madame d'Angère?' said Captain Moore, leaving the chevalier, and seating himself near the rugs in which his wife was almost lost to view. 'You will write to me. You will induce her to see me—to—to—say something more than—I cannot, in short.'

Madame d'Angère assured him that she would use her influence and authority to induce Aveline to accept him, and he fancied he perceived a genuine desire on her part that she should do so. He asked her to speak to Aveline again on the morrow, and to allow him to call and inquire the result. He was so evidently in earnest that he enlisted not only her sym-

pathies but her best wishes; and, when at last he departed reluctantly, he had almost extracted a promise from her that she would contrive another interview for him.

'He is too fierce. Too impatient. He would not suit the child,' said the chevalier, when he was gone.

'I quite forgot to ask him to bring that handsome and polished Captain de Belle-fontaine,' she returned.

'He has promised to come. I will go and tell la petite that her beau capitaine has disappeared,' he returned.

'I am sure he thinks more of Aveline than of me,' she soliloquised, when he had left the room. 'I wish she would marry, and then we should be as before. Still, what would the dogs do in this foreign place? Indeed, what should I do? She knows our ways, and, I must say, is very

affectionate to me. I almost think she loves me better than Quiz does, after all, though she is not a blood relation. I wish she would come and draw up that wretched fire. Alphonse only half does it. Then I want my tea, and so do Loulou and Frou-Frou; don't you, my darlings? I hope they are not going to church again, though I must say they are right to set a proper example of keeping the sabbath to these heath——but Alphonse begs me not to abuse his compatriots, saying it is the custom of their church to go to mass and then to amuse themselves. An awful custom, I think. Business and gaiety and work and racing all going on as if it wasn't Sunday.'

Here the chevalier and Aveline interrupted her thoughts. The latter looked round distrustfully, as if she almost feared to see Captain Moore hidden away behind

one of the many screens, then hurried up to madame.

'He is gone! I am so glad!' she exclaimed, seating herself at madame's feet, and hiding her face in the sofa, upon which Loulou and Frou-Frou began to whine, and to lick her forehead. 'A year is a long time. He will forget me before next Christmas,' she added, glancing up timidly at her benefactress.

'You are very silly, Aveline. Such a settlement. But I am glad it is put off for a year.'

'You are not angry, dear madame? You will let me live with you still! I feared you would turn me away for thus offending you. Oh! I breathe freely once more, I am happy again.'

Aveline rose and cast her arms round Madame d'Angère, who returned the embrace affectionately.

'All is for the best,' said the chevalier, philosophically. 'I can now go again to our oratoire and hear the celebrated Pasteur Manon. Catholic and Protestant flock to him, because he preach the true gospel, and not the church. This is the secret of preaching. You will console one another.'

'I have forgotten everything,' cried Aveline, jumping up. 'You have had no tea or coffee. Fanchon cannot move without orders. I wish no one would come to put us out.'

She went to prepare the said beverages, and the others talked over the event of the day.

In the evening, when the chevalier had gone to church, Aveline and Madame d'Angère read together the evening service of the Church of England. This quieted them, and took them back to

the cottage and the ancient church of Carisbrooke.

'It is best to keep in one's own country, after all,' sighed madame, when they had finished. 'Still I think Frenchmen preferable to Englishmen. Captain de Bellefontaine's manners were superior to Captain Moore's. How did he propose, Aveline?'

'I was so astonished that I scarcely remember,' replied Aveline, startled by the question. 'He said—pray do not ask me, dear madame.'

'But I wish to know. You would scarcely imagine it now, but Alphonse actually fell on his knees when he asked me. I shall never forget. Did Captain Moore?'

'It was far too cold for that,' returned Aveline, laughing merrily. 'Besides, the ground was covered with hoar frost.'

'Still I daresay he would, if you had not

run away. He probably will the next time.'

'I hope he will forget me, and never, never come again,' cried Aveline.

'He is sure to return, and you will do well to change your mind in the interval. You will never have another such proposal.'

'I hope not, dear madame. It frightened me. I feel that I have behaved ill, but it was so unexpected that I could not act differently. Indeed, I could not speak. Do all proposals alarm one so?'

'The chevalier's did not, certainly; but then I was prepared for it. How could it frighten you, Aveline? It was highly complimentary.'

'Was it? But I dislike compliments. Not that he meant to compliment. I am sure he was quite sincere, which, on reflection, makes me sorry to have appeared

so rude. But, had I remained, I could not have said more. I think he will be glad when he reflects on what he has done, because I am poor and should be friendless but for you and dear monsieur.'

The chevalier came in much flustered. Captain Moore had actually waylaid him when he left the church, and had appeared so annoyed and unhappy that he had promised to write to him before he left Fontainebleau on the morrow, and to secure him another interview with Aveline, if possible.

'He is not only au désespoir but en colère,' said the chevalier. 'We offend him, we offend his whole family.'

'I had not reflected on that,' remarked madame. 'I am glad they should be displeased. They have not considered our position when they announced the marriage of Uncle Lisle with Cunninghame.'

'I would rather offend no one,' put in Aveline. 'But indeed, indeed, dear monsieur, I cannot change my mind. I cannot see him again. Oh! let me live and die with you and madame.'

'Perhaps a word from your mouth would gratify him more than one hundred in my letter,' argued the perplexed chevalier. 'He is so vif; he will not take no for de answer. You do not 'ate him, ma petite?'

'Why should I, when he is so kind?' replied Aveline, with questioning eyes.

'I have it. I will go to-morrow, my Amicia, and tell him what she says. That will please him,' cried the chevalier; and no remonstrances on the part of Aveline could change his purpose.

He confided to madame afterwards that he believed she liked him, and that she would change her resolution before the

year was out. This he repeated to Captain Moore the next morning, and that gallant officer left Fontainebleau consoled, if not actually hopeful.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WEDDINGS AND THE BOOK.

IF the announcement of Squire Lisle's marriage with his housekeeper had caused a panic at the Belle Vue, much more had it occasioned one at Lisle and its dependencies. The only people who were not astonished by the news were old Biles, the sexton, and Ratigan, the coachman. But they were discreet enough to hold their tongues. The sisters Dallimore and Churchhouse would not believe it, and declared that there must have been unfair play somewhere, and that their uncle Lisle

would as soon have hanged himself as have married beneath him. But Mr. Moore established the marriage, none the less, which was a gratification to him, if to no one else. Being an out-spoken man, he no longer concealed from his neighbours the fact that he had only rented the manor because his sister had resided there, and because he had been convinced that some secret lay beneath the cessation of her letters to him, and her unaccountable death at the manor, and also because he had heard her character maligned.

'If it were true, it could make no difference as regards the disposition of the property,' said Mrs. Dallimore. 'Lisle is the heir; and nothing could set him aside.'

'Unless we should discover a family. Nothing is impossible,' suggested malicious Mr. Churchhouse, who liked to perplex his womenkind.

'Still, Lisle would have the manor. The squire has left it to him; and he must have known whether he had children or not,' replied the exasperated Mrs. Dallimore. 'I wish the Moores had never come near the place.'

'And our weddings! and Quiz's possible conquest of the captain! Why, they are quite a godsend,' laughed the vicar.

So really thought his wife as the time for the said weddings approached. Mr. Moore was very liberal, and, having riches at command, disbursed them freely on his sons.

'The course of true love' had 'run smooth' in their case, and there were no hitches in the matrimonial arrangements. The vicar declared he had nothing but his blessing to give his daughters, and Mr. Moore said he considered a good man's blessing worth a hundred thousand pounds,

and a million if it brought God's blessing with it.

The happy events took plaee in the early spring, and manor and vicarage were filled with guests. Leonard Leigh was amongst those specially invited to the vicarage, and was his friend Stephen Moore's best man, while Captain Moore officiated in that capacity for the other bridegroom. Of course the Miss Dallimores were amongst the bridesmaids, and Quiz was unquestionably 'Queen of Beauty.'

If one wedding is a pretty sight, a double wedding is still prettier, and certainly Sophy and Lucy Churchhouse, with their eight bridesmaids and goodly company of friends, made as fair a picture as reality can form.

We must, however, leave it, with its bridal robes, floral wreaths, and other acces-

sories, to the reader's imagination, and follow a solitary figure who stands as a stranger among the crowds. It is a woman who surveys the pretty pageant through a white gauze veil. This is the only wedding favour she wears; the rest of her dress is of brown serge. She is as intent, apparently, on the long procession that winds from the private gate of the manor into the churchyard, beneath a canopy of arches, as are the rest of the spectators. The churchyard is thronged, and no sooner has the procession defiled into the church than the sacred edifice is thronged also. The stranger follows the crowd, and takes a place amongst the villagers in the church, which is profusely decorated with flowers. The veiled face turns from side to side until the service commences, when it is directed towards the scene in the chancel. Mr. Church-

house has chosen to perform the ceremony himself, assisted by a brother clergyman, and although his voice falters occasionally —for is he not about to lose the apples of his eyes—he does his solemn work impressively.

Once or twice during the ceremony the strange woman inserts a white handkerchief between her face and veil, doubtless to wipe away those tears which flow naturally from female eyes at the sight of wedding or funeral.

Perhaps Leonard and Quiz are the most noticeable of the wedding party. Quiz is her cousin Lucy's special bridesmaid, so they stand near each other. The white veil is turned more frequently in their direction than any other, except when old Biles quavers out his Amens with commendable resolution; for, although his services are nominally dispensed with as

clerk, he persists in being still foremost in the responses.

When all is over, and the bridal throng adjourn to the vestry for signatures, embraces, and tears, the spectators again defile into the churchyard, and take their stand behind the school-children who are placed in rank and file, on either side of the pathway, with baskets of flowers in their hands. The white veil is conspicuous amongst them. And so, indeed, is the very smart damsel who stands next to its wearer, and who, not being veiled, is easily recognised as our old acquaintance Lily-white. She has lost none of her curiosity or jealousy, and critically examines inferiors and superiors as she awaits the bridal party. Her attention turns not unnaturally on her neighbour, and she wonders who it can be who surveys so festive a scene through so impenetrable a barrier.

She cannot quite determine whether it is a lady, or a lady's-maid, but inclines to think she has come in the latter capacity with some one of the wedding guests. She resolves to find out.

'A beautiful wedding! May I ask, ma'am, if you have come with the party?' she says, turning her very smart bonnet towards the white veil, and striving, ineffectually, to see the face beneath.

'No, I am a stranger; but I like weddings, and came to look on,' is the reply. 'Who are the brides?'

'The daughters of the Reverend Mr. Churchhouse of the vicarage, and the bridegrooms are the sons of George Moore, Esq., of the manor. I live at the manor.'

'Indeed! Then perhaps you may have heard of a little girl named Aveline, who, I understand, was brought to these parts nine or ten years ago by a poor woman

who was—well, I suppose she was out of her mind.'

'I should think I had, indeed. Why, I lived with her.'

'Where is she?'

'Oh, she is at service in a place called Fontainebleau, in France. You know, she was a deserted workhouse child, and when her mother ran away, and afterwards drownded herself, she was put to the Blue School. Then she went as little undermaid—under me, I may say—to a French gentleman and his lady, who was niece of Squire Lisle, as was lord of the manor till Squire Moore took it. She used to wash the dogs, and clean the parrot, and do odd jobs.'

'What was the name of her master and mistress?'

'Angère first of all, till he had a property left him and took a title, and was

called Chevalier d'Angère, and went back to France. They took Aveline with 'em, because she minded the dogs and could do dressmaking. I'm sure I don't envy her, with those two oddities. I'm a deal better off at the manor, for I know my work, and she don't, and never did.'

'You are sure she is in France? You are certain the name of the place is Fontainebleau?'

'As sure as I'm standing with my back to Squire Lisle's grave and my face to the church porch. Here they are! There's the bells!'

The stranger and her white veil were forgotten in the re-appearance of the bridal procession. And no wonder, for it was very pretty. The veiled brides and their grooms trod on the flowers cast by the school-children, while merry bells, enthusiastic shouts, and waving handkerchiefs

accompanied them. Leonard and Quiz headed the following of bridesmaids and groomsmen, succeeded by Captain Moore and Isabella, and a large assemblage of smartly-dressed friends brought up the procession.

'Who is that?' asked the strange woman of Lilywhite, and pointed to Leonard.

'That is the vicar's nephew, Mr. Leonard Leigh,' replied the girl. 'Aveline used to be mad after him because he was kind to her when she was a Blue School girl. But he was just as kind to me—indeed, he's kind to everyone. There's Master Lisle, the heir, walking with little Miss Roche?'

'How is he the heir?'

'The old squire left him the manor, and when he's one and twenty he'll be one of the first men in the island.'

Master Lisle looked what he was, one

of the most important personages of the assemblage. He strutted over the flowers, with a juvenile bridesmaid on his arm, as if he were really 'monarch of all he surveyed.' He had on a magnificent suit of blue velvet and point lace, and looked a miniature King Hal.

'Now we are going to breakfast, and won't I have a jolly feed!' he was heard to exclaim, as he and the rest of the pageant gradually disappeared within the manor grounds.

'That's over! I wonder what'll be up next!' exclaimed Lilywhite, turning to have a last look at her late companion. 'I declare she's gone, and I never saw her face, after all. I wonder who she was, and how she came to ask about Aveline.'

The stranger had disappeared through the nearest gate, and was already in the lane. Lilywhite hurried back to her inter-

rupted labours, thinking over what had passed between them. During their colloquy neither change of voice, attitude, nor manner tended to evince any particular interest in the subject of which they spoke, and the veiled woman might have been an animated statue, so immoveable did she seem. Her voice was low, her enunciation clear, her words few: still Lilywhite reproached herself that she had not elicited from her what she knew of Aveline. Jealousy of that young person still rankled in her heart, and she had not failed to sow a poisonous seed here and there in her new sphere, to the detriment of her imaginary rival's character. Had she known of Captain Moore's proposal, the manor would scarcely have bounded her indignation.

But the captain kept his own counsel, and to see him at the breakfast, you might have supposed him the slave of one, at

least, of the Miss Dallimores. But they, Quiz especially, with the blood of all the Lisles in her veins, could not get over the fact that his father's sister had been their great-uncle's housekeeper, and had actually married him. An exposé that in a larger sphere would have been forgotten the moment after it was made, in their restricted world was matter of continual comment; and envious matrons with unmarried daughters consoled themselves for the vicar's double good fortune by reflecting on this misalliance of half a century ago: nevertheless, the wedding breakfast was a grand sight for hungry guests, and the long oak tables of the great dining-room had not groaned beneath such a weight of good cheer, or been surrounded by such a goodly gathering of the neighbouring aristocracy, for many generations.

Champagne flowed, and many healths

were drunk besides those of the brides and their maidens, who bore their blushing honours meekly. Among them was that of the young heir of all the surrounding acres, who was so intent on the delicacies before him as to be unconscious of the good wishes of his relatives and friends. His response was, 'Why don't they cut the cake?' But the last and most enigmatical toast was proposed by the host himself. He said, that although he was not himself a great reader he believed that the world owed more to literature than to any other profession, army and navy not excepted, and he was desirous of wishing success to a young author who styled himself 'Davenport,' and whose very remarkable book he had just read. Neither by look, word, nor gesture did he intimate that Leonard was implicated. He, meanwhile, grew hot and cold by turns; half rose as if to petition

secrecy; sat down again with a deprecating glance at Mr. Moore, who must, he knew not how, have discovered his synonym, and finally collapsed.

'I had no idea you were so public-spirited, Moore,' laughed the vicar. 'I, too, have read the book, and found it clever and sensible, but too political for a novel; too liberal and too conservative at the same time. The author will have radicals and conservatives equally down upon him. Still I have much pleasure in seconding you in wishing the Anonymous every success.'

This little unexpected episode caused some amusement, and Leonard drew breath when he perceived that no one thought of him. But he was mistaken, for Moore was one of those men who resolved that all secrets should be brought to light, and individuals have fair play.

'I must call on Mr. Leonard Leigh to return thanks on his own behalf; for he is —Davenport,' he said.

The general astonishment and Leonard's confusion may be imagined. All eyes were turned upon him. He was to be found guilty of pursuing the very course that all his friends had deprecated. He was publicly to receive an ovation and a condemnation at once. He had written a book that was acknowledged to be clever, but that contrived to offend the prejudices of a large portion of his friends and the public. He was desirous of secrecy, and now his sin was proclaimed.

'Leonard, you are the author of "The Whirlpool,"' exclaimed his uncle, rising in his surprise.

'Impossible,' cried Mr. Charles Conquest, who had managed to run down for the weddings. 'I know he has been at his

desk in my office the last seven or eight years.'

'It seems to me that all the great writers have been at their desks,' broke in Mr. Moore. 'It is the workers who work.'

'Are you really Davenport?' whispered Quiz, her face aflame with pleasure.

'And you have never been to the university,' echoed Isabella.

'It is all a hoax. Mr. Moore is famous for his practical jokes,' said Mrs. Dallimore, setting her spectacles at Leonard.

Happily for him, before he could reply to these remarks, a diversion arose in his favour. It was time for the brides to change their wedding for their travelling gear, and a new book, however powerful or successful, has little chance at such a time, while the greatest author in the world must yield precedence to a bride-

groom. Still one of the happy magnates of the hour pressed forward to Leonard, saying,

'I thought you knew something about it. I congratulate you with all my heart.'

'On what, Moore? I acknowledge nothing. Let me congratulate you on winning my cousin Lucy, who is far before "The Whirlpool."'

The young men shook hands heartily, which gathered a little crowd round Leonard..

'Then it is true! You did write the book!' exclaimed one and another.

'Nothing is true. I assure you I never gave Mr. Moore any reason to suppose I was an author,' replied Leonard.

As Mr. Moore was not near, the audience was puzzled. Still he was the hero of the hour, and parried with difficulty the

pertinacious thrusts of friends and acquaintances, until the brides re-appeared, and he and his book were instantly forgotten.

'Such is popular favour,' he thought to himself. But he, also, forgot the awkwardness of his position in farewells, old shoes, rice, tears, kisses, carriages, wedding-favours, and the other multitudinous accessories of the departure.

'You must take care of father and mother now,' whispered his favourite cousin Lucy, as he held her hand. 'You can write lots of books at the vicarage.'

'And come and stay with us when we are settled,' broke in her groom. 'And follow our example as soon as you can.'

'And be subjected to all this!' he laughed, as a shower of rice was divided between him and Lucy, who had one foot on the carriage-step.

'Allow me to comb and brush your hair, Leonard,' said Quiz, when the carriages had driven off. 'A celebrated author must drop pearls, not rice.' And he submitted to be manipulated by the queenly maiden.

She took advantage of the few minutes consumed in brushing the rice from his hair and coat to congratulate him on his success, and to prove, by eloquent words and even more eloquent glances, her interest in all that concerned him.

'Success, Quiz!' he repeated, half reflectively, half mockingly. 'That is a mighty word. Here are more grains of rice in my sleeve-cuff! If honeymooning is not more intellectual than the start for it, I hope I may be spared the trial-trip. It must be just like a balloon ascent, when the aeronauts have either too much or too little ballast. They are either lost in the

clouds or dragged back to earth ; either of which alternative would be an unpleasant disappointment.'

'What has that to do with your book and your consequent success, Leonard?' asked Quiz, picking the rice-grains out of the cuff-sleeve very slowly to prolong the *tête-à-tête*.

'This first book—*i.e.*, my balloon venture—is tolerably well ballasted, so say the critics,' he returned. 'The next may be too light or too heavy, may explode, be set on fire, be lost in the clouds, or be dragged for miles over hedge and ditch, or launched into the deep, or be hurled into the chaos of the paper-mill, or——'

'What nonsense you talk, Leonard! Success is success, and you have it,' exclaimed Quiz. 'Your fortune is made.'

'I trust you are a true prophetess,' he returned, surveying the stately girl as she

stood before him in the drive so lately full of bridal life, now, for the moment, deserted. 'My fortune is the best of all fortunes, work. If I might venture to predict yours, it would be leisure. But yours will be marred if you remain beneath the sun in that ephemeral costume. How can ladies or their milliners imagine anything so picturesque?'

'You still eschew our society?' she said, scornfully. 'I have not forgotten your rebuke when you were last in the country.'

'The dangerous classes must always be avoided, Quiz,' he replied, leading the way into the house.

She followed, a frown on her brow, rebellion at her heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

LEONARD'S THREE VOLUMES.

THE festivities in honour of the weddings did not end with the departure of the parties concerned. Most of the guests left soon after the brides and bridegrooms, but the Dallimore family and Mr. Conquest remained. The villagers, young and old, were feasted at manor and vicarage, and the dull blank left by the loss of sons and daughters was filled for the moment by the poor. A substantial meal was given to the older parishioners in the great hall and kitchen of the manor, while

the children were entertained at the vicarage. Leonard had enough to do, for his uncle set him to carve for the youthful cormorants, while he, at Mr. Moore's request, headed a table at the manor.

Thus it was evening before anything like quiet reigned, and what might now be called the family circle met at a late dinner. There was a round dozen of them; for Master Lisle had insisted on remaining, to the annoyance of all but his parents. He had become somewhat of a nuisance; for his will was law, and, like all spoilt children, he exercised it tyrannically. However, he had enough to do in the eating way, and behaved with tolerable discretion.

After a wedding, it is universally acknowledged, comes stupidity. On the present occasion, everyone was tired, and conversation flagged. We may, perhaps,

except Quiz, who managed to keep up her spirits under most circumstances. She directed her arrows at the two young men, and roused them, and they in turn animated the rest, until the stagnant stream began to flow.

'What reason have you for believing that Leonard wrote the "Whirlpool?"' asked the vicar of Mr. Moore.

'He can't deny it. He sent me, by mistake, a scrap in his hand-writing signed Davenport,' was the reply.

'Then, I suppose, his fortune is made. What did you get for your venture, Leonard?' asked Mr. Churchhouse.

'Nothing, uncle. But I may, if it reach a second edition,' returned Leonard.

'Then you don't deny that you are the author?'

'It seems useless, and there is no sufficient reason that I should. Your scep-

ticism alone induced me to conceal it, though I would rather write anonymously.'

'There is always something wrong when people are ashamed of their names,' emphasized Mr. Moore.

'I always reckoned you a clever fellow, but never thought you had brains enough to write a book,' broke in Major Dallimore. 'I declare I must read it, though I never have time for reading; so much to do—eh, Lisle!'

'You do nothing but talk to everybody, and tell funny stories,' replied that youth.

'Are you really going to Fontainebleau, Quiz?' asked Leonard, wishing to turn the conversation from himself.

'I really am. Aunt is not well, and seems to want one of her own people. She is so entirely amongst strangers. I wish that you were going at the same time.'

'*I* mean to go, to see Aveline,' interrupted Lisle.

Captain Moore, who was talking to Isabella on her favourite subject, the collegiate education of women, heard the dear name, and questioned Lisle.

'*You* going to France! Is that to escort your sister?'

'No, to see Aveline.'

'He is so fond of that girl,' explained Mrs. Dallimore. 'She has wheedled herself into the good graces of more than one male member of our family.'

'So Lilywhite says; but she seemed to me a charming young person, and very innocent,' put in Mrs. Moore. 'I suppose the chevalier looks upon her as a daughter?'

'But auntie only considers her as half-companion and half servant,' said Quiz, superciliously.

'Quiz!' ejaculated Leonard, fixing his piercing eyes on the girl, and hers fell.

How handsome she looked in her bridesmaid's dress of creamy white, with crimson ribbons and flowers, and how much Captain Moore seemed to admire her, while Leonard also yielded to the spell of her beauty, and, syren-like, she rejoiced, and strove to enchain them more. She believed to have succeeded with the captain, but misdoubted her power over him whom she loved best. 'But,' she thought to herself, 'he is so cautious, that there is no knowing what he means.'

Had she understood him, she would have discovered that all he meant was 'Honour.'

Major Dallimore and family left soon after dinner on account of Lisle, and the vicarage party immediately after them. Although everyone was worn out with excitement, the quartette of the latter

abode sat up to discuss the events of the day. Mr. Conquest and Leonard had arrived together the previous night, and there had been no time for conversation; but now, as Mr. Churchhouse said dolefully, there was nothing but time. When poor Mrs. Churchhouse had wept till she had no more tears to shed over the weddings, and had reproved her consoling brother-in-law by saying that it was very fine for him, who had no children, to talk of the comfort of marrying one's daughters, Leonard's turn came. He found, for the first time in his life, that his aunt was 'quite proud of him,' and, encouraged by this tardy acknowledgment of his merits, he produced, from a corner in his uncle's library, a small brown paper parcel. He had concealed it there till such time as fitting opportunity might offer for displaying it. He placed it in his aunt's hands,

and, with an effort at composure, said,

'When I first left the vicarage, aunt, where you—where I passed so many happy years with you all, I determined to spend my first savings in buying you a present. I am sorry to say I have not saved a penny, and I knew how you hated debt, and instilled maxims of carefulness. You remember how you used to lecture me about wasting candle by sitting up at night.'

'Of course I do, Leonard. We could not afford it. I hope you are cured of the bad practice.'

'Not quite, aunt. It is still my one fault. But Mr. Conquest pays the gas bill, and, if I have been extravagant, I must ask his pardon.'

Mr. Conquest laughed, and the vicar said he supposed gas was better to write and read by than ends of candle stuck upon save-alls.

'Not nearly so good for the eyes,' remarked his wife.

'Well, dear aunt, having no money, I venture to offer you the fruits of my extravagance in grease and gas. May I unfasten the knot for you?'

'Here is a knife—cut it,' said Mr. Conquest.

'Aunt always taught us to be careful of twine,' laughed Leonard, kneeling by her side and undoing the parcel.

'"Mrs. Churchhouse, with the Author's grateful love." And that is you, Leonard?' read and exclaimed the aunt, as she opened one of the three volumes that the parcel was composed of.

'Yes; I am the culprit who have brought the press down upon me,' replied Leonard, gaily. 'I hope to do better next time, and to have a worthier offering for you.'

The vicar and Mr. Conquest each pos-

sessed himself of a volume, while Mrs. Churchhouse's tears began to flow afresh.

'Don't drop salt water on that glaze!' cried Mr. Conquest. 'The bindings of the present age won't bear damp.'

'Indeed I am very much obliged to you, Leonard. I never had a book "from the author" before. What a bewildering day it has been!' she said.

'It has,' returned her husband. 'Let us be thankful that, as we are getting old, my dear, our children are provided for. The girls have good husbands, the boy is in a fair way to make fame and fortune.'

He held out his hand to Leonard, who grasped it tightly. Then followed a discussion on his future. He still inclined to remain as he was for the present, an author's career being more to his taste than law. Besides, he had received no money for his book, the publishers assuring him

that they undertook it at great risk. It was, in fact, a work in which he had strung together thoughts and opinions on religion, politics, philosophy, and science, original enough but liable to be considered crude if not impertinent when emanating from so young a man. Hence his desire for the anonymous, which he hoped still to maintain with the general public.

'Better stick to law,' said Mr. Conquest. 'We will help you through. Would not the bar be possible?'

'No money. Besides, I am too thin-skinned. I could never undertake a cause I knew to be wrong, or browbeat a witness whom I knew to be right.'

'Bravo, Leonard! But that is very like brow-beating Conquest,' said his uncle.

'I feel rebuked, having been guilty of both,' said the barrister. 'But I seem to have done you all a good turn by introduc-

ing the Moores to the manor. The old man is a sly fellow. He did not tell me that his half-sister lived here until he had scented her marriage. How, nobody knows.'

Leonard winced.

'And now that he has established it, and disposed of two of his sons, he talks of giving it up,' continued Mr. Conquest. 'His lease expires soon, and Mrs. Moore's health demands a change. What a boon it would be if women had no health. Mrs. Conquest was undecided about coming for the wedding till the train was about due, and then she had a spasm or something, and said I must go without her.'

'Men never understand,' broke in Mrs. Churchhouse. 'But she will see the dear girls during their honeymoon. So, I hope, will Amicia, if they visit Fontainebleau. Quiz has a plan for their all meeting at the old château.'

'I suppose that sweet little girl they call Aveline is still there?' said Conquest. 'I wish Amicia would hand her over to my wife. She is the first young person I ever knew her to take a fancy to.'

'I daresay she would gladly,' replied Mrs. Churchhouse, 'for Quiz says Amicia is jealous of her.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed the barrister. 'Of old d'Angère! I admire his taste. Perhaps a similar result might occur in my case. What do you think, Leigh?'

'I cannot imagine anyone being jealous of Aveline,' was Leonard's decided reply.

She was again recalled to him the following morning when he went to the manor. The household was, not unnaturally, in confusion, and Lilywhite answered the door. He recognized her, and spoke to her. She seized the opportunity to tell him of her conversation with the woman in the white veil.

'I make so bold as to tell you, sir, because you was always interested in Aveling,' she said, pompously.

'Thank you, Lilywhite,' he replied, longing to cast back the 'Aveling' in her teeth. 'What was the woman like.'

'I couldn't get so much as a glimpse of her face, Mr. Leonard. Her figure was gen-teel, though she was only dressed in brown serge. No, sir. She didn't show no petticklar interest. She was a-looking at the wedding all the time, and spoke as placid as Mrs. Moore.'

'It was probably some one from Carisbrooke who wanted to discover her address. People are so inquisitive. You gave it?'

'Well, Mr. Leonard, I was took so sudden that I never thought whether I ought to or not; so I said as she was staying in France, with her master and mistress, at

a place called Fontainebleau. I remembered the name because of the cottage.'

'Oh! you were quite right. But you would scarcely call the chevalier and Madame d'Angère her master and mistress.'

'What then, if you please, sir, that I may correct myself when I'm asked again?'

'Well, friends—protectors.'

Leonard hesitated; for, after all, he could find no name more appropriate than master and mistress, and he was annoyed with himself when he received from Lily-white the assurance that she would say 'protectors' when she was asked again, though for her part she liked independence, and 'protectors didn't pay no reg'lar wages.'

'I knew my work, Mr. Leonard, but Aveling didn't. We was both Blue School girls, and I'm a-getting my sixteen pound a year; while I don't know what she would

be good for if madame give her notice.'

'Good day, Lilywhite,' said Leonard, abruptly, hurrying unannounced into Mrs. Moore's morning-room.

He was terribly put out by Lilywhite's opinions, though he felt there was truth in them. He found Mr. and Mrs. Moore together, looking lugubrious. They hailed him with delight, for they needed cheering after the loss of their sons. Captain Moore came in, and, as was natural, they all discussed the weddings. It is noteworthy here that the captain had not mentioned his proposal to Aveline to his parents, and they had been distressed by his unusually irritable and uncompromising manner. He was not good-tempered, and, having been much considered at home and humoured by his mother, he was somewhat tyrannical. Having expected that Aveline would at once accept him, he was soured

by his disappointment, and angry with himself and her. His regiment was ordered to Ireland, and he did not know when he might see her; but he was resolved that it should be the first opportunity, as he had no notion of yielding to the whims of eighteen and the wishes of sixty. The scene in the forest of Fontainebleau at the rendezvous de chasse was always before his eyes, and even handsome Quiz and the festivities of the previous day had not obliterated it. Still his motto had always been heretofore that of the stereotyped soldier,

> 'He that fights and runs away
> May live to fight another day.'

Leonard liked him the least of the three brothers, though he discovered in him many soldierly qualities, much determination, and some talent. But then Leonard was always analysing character, and,

like all analysts, sometimes made mistakes.

'We have had enough of the island,' said that cosmopolitan, Mr. Moore, with a knowing look at Leonard. 'I have established my sister's respectability and got good wives for two of the boys, and now I am going to take Mrs. Moore for a tour to her native continent, until Charley gets married and settles down. When will that be, Charley?'

'Never, probably. I am married to my —profession,' replied the captain, glumly.

'Then you shouldn't flirt, my boy. Why, you tried your hand on seven of the bridesmaids at least, and as to the queen of them, Miss Quiz! You aren't half as prudent as Stephen's best-man, Leigh.'

'Miss Quiz was quite equal to the occasion,' replied the captain.

'I cannot afford to pay attentions to young ladies,' laughed Leonard.

But his prudence was again likely to be tested. When he returned to the vicarage, he found Major Dallimore there. He came with a request that Mr. Conquest and Leonard would escort Quiz to London. He said that they were hurrying on the preparations for her visit to the metropolis, and subsequently to France, in order that she might go up to town with them. He added, with the careless equanimity of the island-bound, that, once safe in London, he would trust to her uncle and aunt to see that she was properly chaperoned across the Channel, and that the chevalier had promised to meet her at Dieppe.

The said aunt had found it impossible longer to defer the promised visit of her nieces, and was much perturbed by the prospect of being introduced to two brides. But Mr. Conquest knew that she had not

expected Quiz so soon, and dreaded her unexpected advent. However, politeness prevented his declining what he was asked to do, and it was arranged that the young lady should meet him at Newport station on the morning fixed for his and Leonard's departure. This was delayed a day or two by business consequent on the expected changes at the manor.

Leonard was touched by the alteration in his aunt's manner towards him. She now joined warmly with his uncle in asking him to consider the vicarage as his home.

'You see, Leonard,' she said, thoughtfully, jotting down the items, 'the dear girls are provided for, and they are no longer any charge to us. You are safe to make money enough to pay for your clothes, and I am sure you are welcome to live with us whenever you like. You can have your old room, and write your

books in it, or another, if you prefer it. You will be company for us, and will help your uncle as you used to do. I was afraid you and Lucy might take a fancy to one another, but——'

'She has done much better, my dear aunt,' supplied Leonard. 'Thank you heartily. I shall be only too glad to have a home of my own again, and that home with my first protectors. I hope you will forgive all my shortcomings of past years.'

Mrs. Churchhouse tried to recall these, and failed, but Leonard's conscience pricked him; for he felt that he had often entertained unkind and satirical thoughts of his aunt.

'Savealls done away, Leonard,' said his uncle. 'Superseded by those economical abominations, benzoline lamps. Warranted not to set fire to your hair by their gaseous qualities, or to choke you by their smell. They will not tempt you to consume the midnight oil.'

'This will be my holiday-home. When here, I shall do nothing but enjoy myself,' said Leonard, gaily. 'One chamber in town, and a second in the country. What could ambition desire more, except to see one's first-born welcomed so kindly, and displayed on the drawing-room table?'

Certainly his three volumes looked imposing, placed at equal distances in the most conspicuous situation, and, being human, he was proud to see the offspring of his brain so cordially received.

The next morning Mr. Conquest and he started for London. They picked up Quiz at Newport, who did not, as Aveline had done, shed tears at parting from her friends; but then she was likely to return to them. The major and Lisle were there to see her off, and Lisle was not so demonstrative as he had been when he bade good-bye to Aveline.

'Don't forget to give my letter to Aveline,' he said. 'Tell her she must come back with you, or I shall grow naughtier and naughtier. Tell Aunt Amicia she was very cross not to ask me.'

'I should have been cross if she had,' said Quiz, 'you are best at home. Goodbye, be a good boy and I will bring you a present.'

'I want Aveline,' was the boy's wistful reply, as she stooped to kiss him.

Quiz had no reason to complain of want of gallantry in either of her cavaliers. As to Mr. Conquest, he exhausted his repertory of compliments, and made himself so agreeable that Leonard had comparatively little to do. What he did, however, he performed to the entire satisfaction of the young lady, who unbent from the assumed hauteur and reserve of the last few days, and was so charming, both in person and

conversation, that any man, young or old, must have been a stoic indeed to have resisted her. She laid aside her satire for the day, and enjoyed the novelty of all she saw as thoroughly as Aveline had done, if not as simply.

Leonard's thoughts reverted more than once to that previous journey, and he found himself comparing the two girls, and speculating on their characters. Not that he had much time for speculations, since Quiz kept both him and the barrister up to the conversational mark.

'You will enliven your aunt and take her out of herself,' said Mr. Conquest, as they reached the metropolis.

'I will do my best, but I have yet to learn what is herself,' replied Quiz. 'I have been probing Leonard, but he is close as an oyster. And are these forlorn looking buildings, London?' she added, as the

train steamed towards Waterloo, the station which Mr. Conquest preferred.

'Certainly mighty London does not look its best at this particular point,' replied Mr. Conquest, and Quiz appeared disappointed when she descended to the crowded platform of the intricate station.

But she was consoled when she was finally placed in Mr. Conquest's handsome carriage, and was assured that she would be driven through Regent Street and other fashionable quarters. Her countenance fell when she bade adieu to Leonard. As there were neither dogs nor parrot, and as he had received no invitation from Mrs. Conquest, there was no excuse for his accompanying his companions to Hampstead; out Mr. Conquest said he hoped to see him there soon, and so he parted from them.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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